

4.13 Lifting and Material Handling Procedures

Intent

The employer has adopted the following procedures for lifting and handling materials to ensure the ongoing health and safety of our employees, and to minimize the incidence of musculoskeletal injuries (MSI) in the workplace.

Scope

This policy applies to all employees always and without exception.

Unionized employees are requested to refer to their current Collective Agreement for specific information pertaining to Lifting and Material Handling Procedures. Where the Collective Agreement is silent, bargaining members shall refer to the contents of this policy. In situations where the directions of this policy cover issues also in the Collective Agreement, the Collective Agreement will be the final authority.

Guidelines

Prior to the manual lifting, pushing, pulling, handling, carrying or transportation of any materials that may cause strain or injury, the employee must examine the material and determine:

- Approximate weight of the load;
- Size and shape of the load;
- The distance that the load must be physically moved, either manually or with the assistance of a device; and
- The best possible solution for moving the load.

If a load is determined to be either too heavy or awkward to move manually, or where a device that could reasonably move the load is unavailable, the employee must consider alternate methods for moving the load.

Lifting Guidelines

- Maintain the natural curvature of your lower back – Note that when you are standing straight, your lower back has a natural curve, creating a slight hollow at the small of the back. When lifting, lowering or moving a load, try to maintain the curve as your spine and back are their most stable in this position.
- Use your core strength – By contracting your core abdominal muscles when lifting, lowering or moving materials, your body will naturally be more rigid and stable, reducing the incidence of injury.
- Avoid twisting – By twisting your back, stability is decreased, as you are no longer using the major muscles of your spine and core, and thus increase the probability of injury.
- Hold the load close to your body – By holding the load close to your body, you can avoid awkwardly bending over, and can use the major muscles in your body. Where appropriate, utilize protective clothing and/or gloves or PPE to avoid injuries that may occur because of holding sharp, dirty, hot, or cold objects close to the body.

Pushing and Pulling Guidelines

Where possible, push materials/loads. Pushing a load is easier as the human body can generate greater force when pushing as opposed to pulling, and you can lean your entire body weight into the load where necessary.

Where possible, use an appropriate transportation device (trolley, cart, wheelbarrow, etc.) to push a load.

Where a load is pulled, you increase the risk of injury due to:

- Running over the feet/ankles, or being struck by carts or trolleys;
- Strain injuries caused by pulling a load while facing the direction of travel, placing the shoulder and back in an awkward posture;
- Potential injuries caused due to an inability to see where you are going if you are pulling and walking backwards.