

Manual Handling Policy

For Australian Small & Medium Enterprises

Template Version 1.0 | December 2024

Important Notice

This template is provided as a general guide only and should be customised to your specific workplace. We recommend reviewing the Hazardous Manual Tasks Code of Practice and having this policy reviewed by a WHS professional before implementation.

1. Purpose

This policy establishes [Company Name]'s approach to managing manual handling risks to prevent musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and injuries. Manual handling injuries are among the most common workplace injuries in Australia, and many are preventable.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All employees, contractors, and visitors
- All work activities involving manual handling tasks
- All [Company Name] workplaces

3. Definitions

3.1 Manual Handling

Any activity requiring the use of force exerted by a person to lift, lower, push, pull, carry, move, hold, or restrain something.

3.2 Hazardous Manual Task

A task that requires a person to lift, lower, push, pull, carry, move, hold, or restrain something that involves one or more of the following:

- Repetitive or sustained force
- High or sudden force
- Repetitive movement
- Sustained or awkward posture
- Exposure to vibration

These characteristics may result in a musculoskeletal disorder.

3.3 Musculoskeletal Disorder (MSD)

An injury or disease of the musculoskeletal system, including muscles, tendons, ligaments, nerves, discs, blood vessels, and bones. Common MSDs include:

- Back injuries and pain
- Sprains and strains
- Soft tissue injuries to joints
- Hernias
- Occupational overuse syndrome

4. Risk Factors

[Company Name] recognises that the following factors increase the risk of manual handling injuries:

4.1 Task Characteristics

- Awkward postures (bending, twisting, reaching)
- Forceful movements
- Repetitive movements
- Long duration of tasks
- Vibration

4.2 Load Characteristics

- Heavy loads
- Large or bulky items
- Unstable loads
- Loads difficult to grasp
- Contents that may shift

4.3 Work Environment

- Slippery or uneven surfaces
- Confined spaces
- Poor lighting
- Extreme temperatures
- Obstructions in work area

4.4 Individual Factors

- Fatigue
- Existing injuries
- Lack of training or experience

- Physical capacity

5. Risk Management Process

[Company Name] follows the risk management process:

- Identify hazardous manual tasks
- Assess the risks
- Implement controls (following hierarchy)
- Review effectiveness

6. Control Measures

6.1 Hierarchy of Controls

Controls are implemented following the hierarchy of controls:

- Elimination – remove the need for manual handling
- Substitution – use mechanical aids or alternative methods
- Engineering controls – modify the task, load, or environment
- Administrative controls – change work practices, provide training

6.2 Elimination and Substitution

- Automate tasks where practicable
- Use mechanical aids (forklifts, trolleys, hoists, conveyors)
- Deliver goods directly to point of use
- Redesign work processes to eliminate handling

6.3 Engineering Controls

- Adjust work heights to reduce bending
- Install lifting devices and trolleys
- Reduce load weights by repackaging
- Add handles to loads
- Improve floor surfaces
- Ensure adequate space for movement

6.4 Administrative Controls

- Rotate workers between tasks
- Provide rest breaks
- Team lifting for heavy loads
- Training in safe manual handling techniques
- Clear labelling of heavy items
- Standard operating procedures

7. Safe Manual Handling Techniques

When manual handling is required, employees should:

7.1 Plan the Lift

- Assess the load – weight, size, stability, grip
- Plan the route – clear of obstacles
- Consider if help or equipment is needed
- Ensure destination is clear

7.2 Prepare to Lift

- Stand close to the load
- Feet shoulder-width apart, one foot slightly in front
- Bend at the knees, not the waist
- Keep back straight
- Get a secure grip

7.3 Perform the Lift

- Lift smoothly using leg muscles
- Keep the load close to the body
- Avoid twisting – move feet to turn
- Keep head up, looking forward

7.4 Carrying

- Keep load close to body at waist height
- Take small steps
- Maintain clear vision
- Set down by reversing the lift procedure

7.5 Team Lifting

- One person to coordinate
- Plan and communicate the lift
- Lift and lower together on agreed signal
- Workers of similar height where possible

8. Mechanical Aids

[Company Name] provides mechanical aids to assist with manual handling:

- Pallet jacks
- Trolleys and carts
- Forklifts (operated by licensed operators)

- Hoists and lifting devices
- Conveyor systems

Employees must be trained in the safe use of mechanical aids before operating them.

9. Reporting

Employees must report:

- Any manual handling hazards
- Pain or discomfort from manual handling
- Injuries (no matter how minor)
- Near misses
- Damaged equipment or mechanical aids

Early reporting of discomfort can prevent more serious injuries.

10. Responsibilities

10.1 Management

- Implement this policy and provide resources
- Ensure hazardous manual tasks are identified and controlled
- Provide mechanical aids and equipment
- Ensure workers are trained
- Review manual handling incidents and controls

10.2 Supervisors

- Ensure workers follow safe manual handling practices
- Monitor for hazardous manual tasks
- Respond to reports of discomfort or hazards
- Ensure mechanical aids are available and maintained
- Model safe practices

10.3 Employees

- Follow safe manual handling practices
- Use provided mechanical aids
- Report hazards, discomfort, and injuries
- Participate in training
- Maintain fitness for work
- Ask for help when needed

11. Training

Training is provided on:

- Manual handling hazards and risks
- Safe manual handling techniques
- Use of mechanical aids and equipment
- Hazard identification and reporting
- Job-specific manual handling procedures

Training is provided at induction and refreshed regularly.

12. Health Monitoring

[Company Name] encourages employees to:

- Report early signs of discomfort or pain
- Seek medical advice for persistent symptoms
- Participate in return to work programs if injured

Early intervention leads to better outcomes.

13. Review

This policy will be reviewed:

- At least annually
- Following manual handling injuries
- When work activities or equipment change
- When new hazards are identified

Employee Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that I have read and understood [Company Name]'s Manual Handling Policy. I understand my responsibilities for safe manual handling and agree to follow the procedures and use provided equipment.

Employee Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____