

Hazardous Manual Tasks:

Preventing Musculoskeletal Disorders



Did you know?

MSDs are the most common workplace injury claim across all industry sectors.



What are Hazardous Manual Tasks (HMTs)?

Manual tasks (also known as manual handling) are tasks where a person is required to lift, lower, push, pull, carry, hold or restrain any person, animal or thing.

A manual task becomes hazardous when it involves:

- repetitive or sustained force
- high or sudden force
- repetitive movement
- sustained or awkward posture
- exposure to vibration.

Hazardous manual tasks can occur in any workplace, across all industries – not just in physically demanding jobs.

These tasks place strain on muscles, joints, tendons and the spine, and can lead to **musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs)** such as spinal disc and back injuries, tendonitis, rotator cuff injuries, and sprains and strains.

Why it is important to manage MSD risks from HMTs?

Managing risks from hazardous manual tasks helps businesses to:

- prevent injuries and long term pain
- improve productivity and worker performance
- reduce workers' time off work and sick leave
- reduce workers' compensation costs and insurance premiums
- meet legal obligations.

Under South Australian Work Health and Safety laws (**WHS Regulation 60**), employers must manage the risks of a musculoskeletal disorder associated with

How to manage MSD risks?

Managing MSD risks requires using the risk management process:



STEP 1

Identify hazards

Consult with workers by:

- asking what causes them pain or discomfort
- identifying tasks that are hard to do or are avoided.

The Discomfort Survey is a useful tool to support this step.



Observe manual tasks

Look for tasks involving:

- repetitive or sustained force
- high or sudden force
- repetitive movement
- sustained or awkward posture
- exposure to vibration.

Review information such as:

- injury and incident records
- workers' compensation claims
- maintenance or hazard reports.

Look for patterns and trends.

The HMT identification tool can help you record information and prioritise hazardous manual tasks in your workplace.



STEP 2

Assess the risk

Conduct a risk assessment to determine which postures, movements, forces or vibration from the task, pose a risk in combination with:

- the task duration (how long) and
- frequency (how often).

Be sure to involve workers throughout the risk assessment process.

Identify the sources of risk, such as:

- work area design or layout
- nature, size, weight of things handled
- systems of work in place (including work pace and organisational factors)
- environmental conditions (heat, cold, lighting).

The HMT Risk Assessment and Control Tool helps to determine MSD risk, identify sources of risk and select suitable controls.



STEP 3

Control the risk

Follow the hierarchy of controls when selecting and implementing control measures. Often a combination of controls is implemented to address the sources of the risk.

Examples include:

- redesigning work areas or layouts
- reducing the weight, size or number of items handled
- using mechanical aids
- changing systems of work
- improving the work environment.

Provide training to workers which includes:

- the nature of the work carried out by the worker
- the nature of the risks associated with the work
- the control measures implemented.

'How to lift' training (i.e. bend your knees and keep your back straight) is not, of itself, suitable and adequate training necessary to protect workers from risks of work-related musculoskeletal disorders.



The HMT Training factsheet helps ensure HMT training is suitable and adequate.



STEP 4

Review & monitor control measures

Check that controls:

- remain effective
- are fit for purpose
- suit the task and work conditions.

Review controls by:

- consulting workers
- conducting workplace inspections
- reviewing injury, discomfort and incident data.

You can use the same methods from Step 1 to check whether controls are working.

For further guidance and access to SafeWork SA tools and resources.



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