



Manual tasks in Supermarkets information and checklist

Introduction

In 2011 WorkSafe conducted an enforcement campaign dealing with manual task issues in supermarkets. As part of this campaign the following newsletter was developed to outline the manual tasks issues which can be present in supermarkets.

Also included are the checklists used by WorkSafe inspectors during this campaign. Please use these checklists to ensure your workplace meets with the Occupational Safety and Health legislation

What are the issues

A checklist has been developed which may assist you assess your workplace for hazards related to manual tasks. This checklist is included in this publication (from page five onwards). Issues covered by the checklist include:

- Manual tasks training
- Systems for manual tasks
- Equipment – steps, ladders and trolleys
- Equipment – forklifts and pallet jacks
- Loading docks
- Rear stores area
- Rear cool rooms
- Front of store/ shelving
- Checkout work areas
- General access/ egress and environment
- Other issues

Further information can be obtained by contacting WorkSafe on 9327 8777 or by visiting the website: www.worksafe.wa.gov.au

What are manual tasks?

Manual tasks refer to any activity that requires a person to use their physical body (musculoskeletal system) to perform work. It includes manual handling (the use of force in lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying or otherwise moving, holding or restraining any person, animal or thing); repetitive actions; adopting awkward or sustained postures and tasks that expose workers to vibration.

What is a risk assessment?

The occupational safety and health laws require risk assessments to be carried out.

A risk assessment is the process of determining whether there is a risk associated with an identified hazard, that is, whether there is any likelihood of injury or harm. The process should include consultation with people involved in the task, as well as consideration of the, experience and training of the operator, individual tasks to be performed and the length of time the operator is exposed to the identified hazards.

How do I use these checklists?

1. Use the checklists in this newsletter to inspect your workplace. You may see other hazards as you are going through – add them to the checklist.
2. Anything that you have ticked 'No' or added to the list needs to be fixed. So, look at each hazard using the table below to prioritise identified hazards.

Risk rating table – for working out level of risk Use the vertical and horizontal columns to consider both the likelihood of injury or harm to health and the consequences to work out the level of risk

Likelihood of injury or harm to health	Consequences of any injuries or harm to health			
	Insignificant eg no injuries	Moderate eg first aid	Major eg extensive injuries	Catastrophic eg death
Very likely	High	Extreme	Extreme	Extreme
Likely	Moderate	High	Extreme	Extreme
Moderate	Low	High	Extreme	Extreme
Unlikely	Low	Moderate	High	Extreme
Highly unlikely (rare)	Low	Moderate	High	High

Risk assessment is a 'best estimate' on the basis of available information. It is important the responsible person undertaking a risk assessment has the necessary information, knowledge and experience of the work environment and work process, or such a person is involved.

3. If the hazard falls into 'high' or 'extreme', based on your view of how likely it is someone will get hurt and what level of injury could happen, then you need to fix it straight away.

If it is lower down in the table – moderate or low – then plan when you will fix it.

Remember hazards have to be controlled – you can't ignore them.

Risks

What injuries can result from manual tasks?

Workplace injuries most commonly linked to manual tasks include sprains and strains (most commonly of the muscles, ligaments and tendons supporting the shoulders, back and neck); hernias; and disc injuries to the spine. Such injuries are a major cause of lost time at work.

Injuries can be the result of gradual wear and tear (eg from frequent or prolonged manual tasks over a period of time), or sudden damage (eg from a single lift of something very heavy or awkward to handle, or from an unexpected event that result in injury (eg a worker trips and falls while carrying a large, heavy carton).

In the 2008-2009 financial year, workers compensation claims from injuries that resulted from "body stressing" made up 37.6% of all lost time claims in WA, with an average lost time duration of 90.5 days. When manual task injury data is combined with slips, trips and falls injury data, the supermarket industry accounts for higher numbers of lost time injuries to sales assistants and storepersons than any other industry in WA.

How do I reduce the risk of injury from manual tasks?

The first step, in consultation with your workers, is to identify the manual task hazards for your workplace. This can be done via completing workplace walk-throughs or inspections to identify hazards; analysis of past hazard and incident forms and previous injury records; talking with workers about tasks they find difficult or demanding; and observing staff while they complete common tasks to collect information.

Next, in consultation with workers, identify trends and determine which tasks are higher risk/priority. For each task, complete a risk assessment to identify which risk factors are present for that task. Risk factors may be actions & postures; forces & loads; vibration; work environment; systems of work; and worker characteristics – please refer to the WA Manual Tasks Code of Practice (2010) available on the WorkSafe website for more information. The risk assessment should also determine what consequences/harm may result from performing that task, and how likely it is that this harm occurs.

Finally, for each hazard, determine what controls are needed to minimise risk.

Where does the risk for manual tasks come from?

The risks for manual tasks in supermarkets come from a range of sources including:

1. work area design and layout (eg confined spaces, storage of heavy items on high or low shelves)
2. the nature of the item, equipment or tool (eg trolleys that are not appropriate for the task or are poorly maintained making them difficult to push/pull)
3. the nature of the load (eg heavy boxes, bulky or awkward stock)
4. the working environment (eg cool temperatures in freezers or cool rooms)
5. systems of work, work organisation and work practices (eg repetitive tasks, inadequate breaks or task variety, unreasonable timeframes/workload).

What are the most common manual task risk factors for supermarket workers?

The most common risk factors encountered in manual tasks performed by supermarket workers (although it will vary between the various job roles) include:

- handling heavy, bulky or awkward loads
- holding loads/ arms away from trunk
- twisting back, neck or upper body
- reaching and load handling at low levels and above shoulder height
- repetitive movements
- strenuous lifting, lowering, carrying, pushing and pulling
- load handling on one side
- sustained and repetitive gripping
- inadequate task variety or breaks
- working under time pressures
- working in cold environments
- postural or movement constraints due to working in narrow or obstructed work areas

Controlling risks

Controlling the risk of injury may involve:

1. eliminating the hazard or hazardous task
2. re-designing, modifying, altering or substituting the hazard or hazardous task
3. administrative controls

Finally, when any control is implemented, make sure follow up and evaluation occurs to ensure that the control is adequately eliminating or minimising the risk and has not introduced new risks.

Controls

Controls that **eliminate the hazard** include using automated equipment to move stock rather than manually moving stock. Options include:

- conveyors at checkouts
- forklifts to move pallets
- automated pallet jacks or motorised trolleys that require guidance only
- vacuum lifters or overhead lifting hoists

Re-design, modify or substitute

Tasks can be *redesigned, modified, altered or substituted* to minimise the risk of the manual task hazard. Controls that achieve this aim include:

- Modifying the work area and layout
- Modifying the working environment
- Modifying the items, equipment and tools
- Modifying systems of work, work organisation and work practices
- Modifying the load

Modifying the work area and layout

- redesign of workplace layout and systems to eliminate double handling (eg using double sided upright dairy fridges, where newer stock is loaded from the rear, eliminating the need to remove older goods prior to stocking for stock rotation)
- redesign layout of storage areas both at front and rear of stores, so that heaviest items are stored between mid-thigh and chest height
- improve access to pallets, so that pallets are accessible from every side, and use pallet stands or pallet lifters to raise the heights of pallets when handling stock at lower levels of the pallet
- ensure adequate space to access shelving systems, cool rooms and equipment to minimise twisting or work in constrained postures
- ensure that equipment is stored close to where it is needed to encourage use

Modifying the load

- where goods are provided by suppliers in large, awkward or heavy containers/ bags, negotiate with suppliers for goods to be provided in smaller sizes/weights or more appropriate containers (eg replacing sacks with boxes/containers with built in handles)
- break goods down into smaller loads prior to movement of goods
- instigate height and weight restrictions on trolleys (especially cage trolleys) to allow clear vision over trolleys and reduce strenuous pushing/ pulling

Modifying the items, equipment & tools

- ensure that the appropriate (type, size, numbers) equipment is available for use in manual tasks – eg steps, platform ladders and various trolleys
- automate pallet jacks and trolleys so that strenuous pushing/ pulling is not required
- provide height adjustable work benches for produce, bakery, deli and butchers areas to accommodate different sized staff
- modify checkout stations to provide both left and right hand stations, to reduce repetitive load on one side of the body

Modifying the working environment

- improve lighting, reduce noise and other distractions and ensure adequate ventilation
- provide adequate space for handling objects (ie avoid over-ordering of stock, which impacts on ability to store and handle stock safely and leads to overcrowding of shelves and floor space)
- ensure floor surfaces are maintained in good, smooth and clean/ clear condition to facilitate effective use of trolleys and prevent slips/tips
- provide anti-fatigue matting where workers stand for prolonged periods

Modifying systems of work, work organisation & work practices

- provide adequate rest breaks; task variety; and rotation between tasks or work areas (eg between right and left hand checkouts, bulk checkouts and express lanes) to allow workers to use different actions and postures
- ensure workloads are appropriate to physical capacity of workers, resulting in a safe work rate
- space deliveries over the course of the week, so that there are not peaks in handling of incoming goods on any one day or time of day
- ensure appropriate staffing levels at peak time periods
- review if working hours are appropriate for the types of manual tasks being completed
- ensure all equipment is regularly inspected, serviced and maintained for continued ease of use
- involve staff in selection of new equipment, and where possible, trial equipment prior to purchase

Administrative controls

Administrative controls

- Administrative controls are the last line of defence and should not be used as the primary or only control for manual task hazards. Administrative controls include:
- provision of training, information and supervision
- developing and enforcing policies and procedures
- providing personal protective equipment such as jackets and gloves for cool room work. (Please note: WorkSafe does NOT support the use of back braces for lifting tasks. See our website for more information)

Other issues

Training in manual tasks

Training for manual tasks should include both theoretical and practical training for supermarket workers, and should occur both at induction for new staff, and on a regular (yearly) basis thereafter.

Theoretical training should cover a risk management approach, that is, workers should be able to identify manual task hazards, assess the risk of injury from exposure to those hazards, and determine what controls are needed to minimise the risk. When faced with their usual work tasks, this means that the worker should be able to identify those risk factors that may potentially make their work hazardous (for example, lifting above chest height or prolonged standing). They should also know what processes to follow to report hazards, so that these can be addressed by management.

Task specific training might include information on preparing the environment for the manual task; effective working postures; how to select and use equipment; and techniques training in lifting, pushing/pulling, carrying and holding.

More information on training requirements is available in the Code of Practice: Manual Tasks (2010), available for free download from www.worksafe.wa.gov.au. WorkSafe also has a free manual handling training package available for employers to modify, adopt and use as their own, also available for download through the website.

Dangerous Incident

A 17 year old worker in the produce department of a supermarket sustained a significant back injury from handling 20kg bags of onions. The bags were lifted from a pallet at floor level to a trolley and transported to the customer selection bins. The bag would then be lifted into the bin, before being cut open and emptied into the bin. This task would be completed several times during the course of a shift.

There was no mechanical means of assistance provided to eliminate the manual handling. The worker was not provided with adequate manual handling training (having only watched an induction video which contained only a small section on lifting). Formal risk assessments were not completed for manual tasks at the store, and store managers were not trained in conducting hazard identification, risk assessment or control.

The employer was convicted and fined \$100 000 for failing to provide a safe workplace and meet their duty of care to the employee. The worker is now wheelchair dependent and has not walked since the injury.

Is using a trolley a good idea?

To avoid manual handling injuries the use of trolleys is recommended. However trolleys that are not maintained or overloaded can result in injury.

Strain injuries may occur when:

- trolleys are difficult to maneuver;
- trolley wheels are too small or poorly maintained;
- the trolleys and their loads are too heavy when other risk factors, such as the number of times a trolley is moved or the workplace layout, are taken into account;
- surfaces over which trolleys are pushed are uneven or mismatched;
- trolleys are moved over large distances or up steep slopes;
- trolleys are difficult to grip due to the absence or poor location of handles; and
- vision is impaired by an overloaded trolley.

Further information

The WorkSafe website contains a number of publications which may assist you in making your workplace a safer place. Go to the WorkSafe website www.worksafe.wa.gov.au

Codes of practice

- Manual tasks

Bulletins

- Manual handling hazards in the liquor retail industry
- Machine guarding
- Tips for investigating accidents and incidents

Guides

- Checkout workstations in retail
- Armed hold-ups and cash handling
- Manual tasks training package

Checklists

Training checklist			
Check	yes	no	comments
Manual task training occurs at induction and yearly refreshers			
Training has practical and theory components			
Theory covers a risk management approach (hazard ID, risk assessment, common risk factors and risk controls); how to report hazards; basic anatomy of the spine and types of injuries that result from manual tasks			
Practical covers preparing environment, selecting and using equipment; effective working postures and technique training for lifting, push/pull, carrying and holding			
Workers are tested and observed/ supervised to make sure they understand and apply the training			

Systems checklist			
Check	yes	no	comments
Manual task hazards are identified via a range of means (workplace inspections, analysis of hazard/ incident reports, hazard reporting system, consultation with employees, observing tasks)			
Risk assessments are completed for identified manual task hazards			
Work processes are designed to minimise double handling of stock (eg stock rotation, double handling from pallets/ trolleys/ shelving)			
Workers rotate between work areas, work tasks and work environments to minimise repetition and prolonged periods in sustained postures			
Workers have adequate rest breaks			
Stock deliveries are spaced across the work week to minimise peaks in manual task requirements on any one day			

Equipment: ladders, steps and trolleys checklist			
Check	yes	no	comments
Appropriate steps and platform style step ladders available (meet Australian Standards; platform supports whole of both feet; rated for commercial/ industrial use; adequate height; lightweight/ mobile for easy of movement)			
Steps and ladders are stored close to where they are needed			
Sufficient numbers of steps and ladders are available			
Appropriate trolleys available (range of trolleys according to type needed; goods easily accessible when on/ in trolley)			
Trolleys are used appropriately (not overloaded, stock is securely stacked, worker can see over the top of trolley to path ahead)			
Trolleys stored close to where they are needed			
Sufficient numbers of trolleys are available			
Flooring is kept clear, clean and free of debris to allow ease of trolley use			
Trolleys, ladders and steps are regularly inspected and maintained to ensure continued good condition (eg checking handles, castors, platforms for general condition, wear and tear, build up of dirt)			

Equipment: Forklift/ pallet jacks checklist

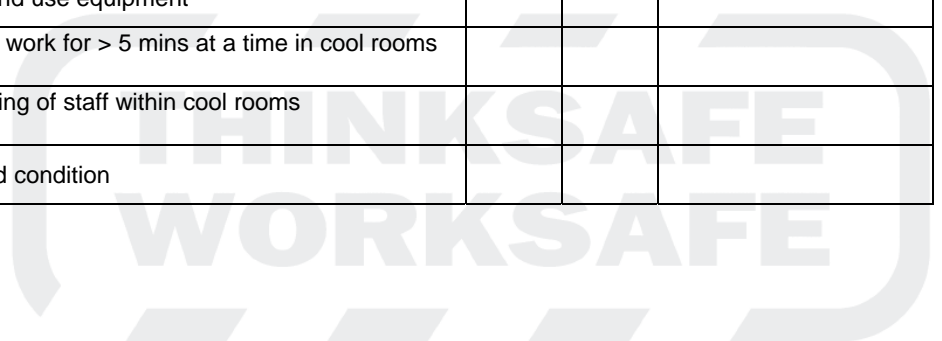
Check	yes	no	comments
Staff using forklifts have appropriate training and license, and consistently wear seatbelts			
Forklift appropriately maintained (log books, pre-start checklists, regular servicing/ inspection) and in good condition			
Staff using pallet jacks have been appropriately trained			
Pallet jacks are in good condition and regularly inspected/ maintained			
Pallet jacks stored close to where used/ needed, to encourage use			
Pallets are not overloaded with stock, creating excessive push/pull forces when using pallet jacks			
Pallets are loaded to a safe working height, allowing clear vision over stock when using forklift or pallet jack			

Loading docks checklist

Check	yes	no	comments
Loading dock is designed to prevent risk of forklifts, pallet jacks or pedestrians falling over edge (for example, highlighted edges, raised edges, chained off sections when trucks not there)			
Loading dock surface in good condition to minimise slips/trips or jerky movements on equipment			
Loading dock has a dock leveller where needed, and dock leveller is regularly inspected and maintained			
Loading dock is easily accessible and not congested			
Systems in place to minimise risk of collision between pedestrians and forklifts/ other equipment			
External doors to loading docks are easy to open and in good condition			
Overhead rail system in place for movement of whole/ half meat carcasses from trucks directly to butcher departments			

Rear cool rooms checklist

Check	yes	no	comments
Stock stored on pallets and shelving to an appropriate/ safe height (allows access at below shoulder height, either with or without equipment)			
Stock is stored on shelves to an appropriate depth (does not require extensive reach)			
Stock is stable with minimal risk of falling			
Heaviest and most commonly used items stored between mid thigh and chest height			
Equipment (trolleys, steps/ ladders) is readily available to assist and stored in convenient location			
There is sufficient space in which to work and use equipment			
PPE is provided where staff are required to work for > 5 mins at a time in cool rooms (eg gloves, warm jackets)			
Systems present to prevent accidental locking of staff within cool rooms			
Cool room door is easy to open and in good condition			



Rear stores areas (including bakery, fresh produce and butchery) checklist

Check	yes	no	comments
Stock stored on pallets and shelving to an appropriate/ safe height (allows access at below shoulder height, either with or without equipment)			
Stock is stored on shelves to an appropriate depth (does not require extensive reach)			
Stock is stable with minimal risk of falling			
Heaviest and most commonly used items stored between mid thigh and chest height			
Equipment (trolleys, steps/ ladders) is readily available to assist and stored in convenient location			
There is sufficient space in which to work and use equipment			
Empty pallets are moved safely and securely stored			
Pallet lifters or pallet stands are available to raise height of pallets when unloading items at low levels			
Pallets are positioned so that all sides of pallet are accessible			
Floors/ stores locations are clearly marked to show pallet placement/ walkways			
Work benches are at appropriate heights or cater to different heights of staff via adjustability, different height benches or standing platforms			

Front of store shelving/storage checklist

Check	yes	no	comments
Stock stored on ridge capping to an appropriate and safe height (is below shoulder height when using platform ladder to access)			
Stock stored on shelves/ ridge capping to an appropriate depth (does not require extensive reach to rear stock)			
Stock is stored securely and is stable with minimal risk of falling			
Heaviest and bulky/awkward items are stored between mid thigh and chest height			
Fridges and Freezers are designed to minimise awkward postures during stocking tasks (for example, upright freezers, rather than deep chest style freezers)			

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Checkout work areas checklist

Check	yes	no	comments
Both left and right hand style check outs are available			
Workers rotate regularly between left and right hand style check outs			
Workers rotate regularly between bulk and express customer service lanes			
Systems in place to minimise overloading of eco-bags			
Systems in place to leave heavy items in trolleys (eg soft drinks, bulk dog food), such as touch screen, barcode copies for scanning			
Anti fatigue matting is in place at checkout stations			
Checkout work station is designed to minimise bending, twisting, reaching and repetitive movement (eg has conveyor belts, upright and horizontal scanners, bag holders in proximity to scanners, weighing stations incorporated into scanners, touch screens or reference guides at appropriate heights/ within easy reach)			
Checkout operators have adequate, regular seated breaks			

General access/egress & environment checklist

Check	yes	no	comments
Passages and walkways are kept free from obstructions			
Appropriate emergency exits are provided, kept free from obstructions and are signposted			
Environment is generally in clean condition, clear from clutter, and minimises risk of constrained postures due to overcrowding			
Environment is well lit, with good ventilation and temperature controlled			

Other issues checklist

Check	yes	no	comments
Systems in place for workplace consultation (safety committees, safety reps, regular staff meetings, new equipment trials with workers, workers are involved in investigating hazards/ incidents)			
Notifiable injuries are reported to WorkSafe			
Incidents and hazards are investigated and investigation outcomes are communicated to workers			
General safety induction is provided to all new workers, including training in hazard identification and reporting of incidents			
Appropriate supervision is provided for all workers to ensure compliance with safety instructions			

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