

TOOLBOX TALK

Manual handling toolbox talk

About six minutes · Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992

SITE

DATE

GIVEN BY

WHY IT MATTERS

In 2024/25, 511,000 workers in Great Britain were living with a back, neck or limb problem caused or made worse by their work, and over the three years to March 2025 construction had the highest rate of any industry. The main causes workers report are manual handling, awkward or tiring positions and repetitive work. That is 7.1 million working days lost in a year, an average of fourteen days per case.

Very few of these injuries came from one big lift that went wrong. They came from blocks laid below the knee all week, bags carried further than they needed to be, boards taken up stairs because the hoist was busy. The damage builds quietly, then one ordinary morning the back goes. This talk is about taking the strain out of the job before that morning.

HSE, Work-related musculoskeletal disorders statistics in Great Britain, 2025

THE POINTS TO MAKE

☐ **Avoid the lift first**

The law puts the choices in order. Before anyone picks a load up, ask whether it needs moving by hand at all. Can it be delivered to where it is used? Can the telehandler, hoist, pallet truck or sack barrow take it? Can the pack be split or a lighter product used? If the handling can be designed out, that is the method.

☐ **Task, individual, load, environment**

Four things decide how risky a handling job is. The task: twisting, stooping, reaching, carrying distance, how often. The person: fitness, training, injuries, pregnancy, new to the job. The load: heavy, bulky, hard to grip, sharp, wet, shifting. The place: slopes, soft ground, trenches, stairs, weather, light. Change any one of them and the risk changes.

☐ **Heavy blocks and kerbs**

The lightest block that meets the design is specified, and the point of use is where it is delivered. Two people lifting a dense block together is not usually a suitable answer; the answer is a lighter block, a block grab, a vacuum lifter or a different method. Concrete kerbs can weigh more than seventy kilograms, and HSE says laying them by machine is the preferred method. Nobody carries blocks up a ladder.

☐ **Say so, early**

If a load feels too heavy, too awkward or the ground is wrong, stop and say so before the lift, not after. If your back, neck or shoulder is sore, tell your supervisor the same day so the job can be changed while it is still a strain and not an injury. Nobody is judged for asking for the barrow.

☐ **There is no legal weight limit**

No number in law says a load is safe or unsafe. HSE gives guideline figures as a quick filter. Above them, or where the load is awkward, the task is repeated or the ground is poor, it needs a proper assessment. Weight is one factor among several. The guideline figures drop when the load is held at arm's length, low down or above the shoulder, because that is where injuries are most likely.

☐ **Repetition is the quiet injury**

Injuries from blocks, kerbs and bags rarely come from one lift. They come from the same movement hundreds of times a day with no recovery. Set out block stacks and spot boards beside you, not behind. Lay between knee and chest height. Widen trenches so blocks are laid at foot level, not below it. Rotate heavy tasks across the day.

☐ **Lift well when you have to lift**

Plan the lift: where is it going, is the route clear, is there somewhere to put it down. Feet apart, one slightly forward. Hug the load close, heavy side nearest. Bend your back, hips and knees a little at the start, not a full stoop and not a deep squat. Keep your head up and move smoothly, no jerking. Turn with your feet, not your waist. Put it down, then adjust.

SITE	DOCUMENT Manual handling toolbox talk	REVISION	DATE	PAGE 1 of 3
------	--	----------	------	----------------

TOOLBOX TALK, CONTINUED

Manual handling toolbox talk: do, do not, and the questions

DO

- Ask whether the load needs moving by hand before anyone picks it up.
- Get materials delivered as close as possible to where they are used, on level ground, single stacked where you can.
- Use the hoist, telehandler, pallet truck, sack barrow or block grab whenever one would do the job.
- Check the route is clear, lit and firm, and the set-down point is ready before you lift.
- Keep the load close, feet apart, head up, and turn with your feet.
- Report aches, pains and awkward loads the same day so the work can be changed.

DO NOT

- Do not carry blocks, bags or boards up a ladder. Use the hoist or a platform.
- Do not twist while holding a load. Put it down, move your feet, pick it up again.
- Do not lay or lift below knee height or above shoulder height for long periods.
- Do not rely on two people for a dense block when a lighter block or a machine is available.
- Do not carry on with a sore back because the job is nearly finished.
- Do not lift a load you cannot see over or get a firm grip on. Split it or get help.

ASK THE TEAM

- ? Which loads on this site today are heaviest, and how are they getting to where they are used?
- ? What handling kit do we have on site, and where is it right now?
- ? Where are we laying or lifting below the knee or above the shoulder, and can we change the height?
- ? If a block or bag feels wrong, who do you tell and what happens next?
- ? Has anyone got a strain or ache at the moment that we should be working around?

TO CLOSE

Backs do not go on purpose. They go because the stack was behind you, the hoist was busy, the trench was narrow and the job was nearly done. The lift you can design out is the safest lift there is. If a load looks wrong, stop, ask, and we will find a better way to move it.

Record it. Who gave the talk, where, when, who was there and what was raised. The last page is the record.

SITE	DOCUMENT Manual handling toolbox talk	REVISION	DATE	PAGE 2 of 3
------	--	----------	------	----------------

ATTENDANCE RECORD

Manual handling toolbox talk: given and understood

Each person signs on the day to say they were present and understood the talk. Anyone who joins the team later is given the talk before starting, and signs here.

SITE	DATE	TIME	GIVEN BY
NAME	COMPANY	TRADE OR ROLE	SIGNATURE

QUESTIONS RAISED, AND THE ANSWERS GIVEN	ACTIONS AGREED, WHO AND BY WHEN	
TALK GIVEN BY (SIGNATURE)	POSITION	DATE

MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK REGULATIONS 1999, REGULATION 10: INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES