

Taking the strain

opinion



Gerry Simpson of Barloworld Handling looks at the safety risks involved in manual handling and how to minimise them.

As the most common cause of injury resulting in three or more days off work in the UK, it is no wonder that manual handling is such a high priority for the HSE. Manual handling is a common term for lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling and carrying loads, but unless handled correctly in the workplace, such activities can cause injury by putting a strain on the limbs, tendons, heart and most commonly the muscles and back.

According to HSE statistics, 247,000 people from 2006 to 2007 reported suffering work related MSD (Musculoskeletal Disorder, a symptom of strain from manual handling), costing UK employers an estimated 10 million lost working days and £600million. It is one of the biggest causes of injury in the workplace, more so than trips, slips or falls from height. How can we overcome the issue of manual handling injuries and reduce these concerning statistics?

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended) outline a recommended three-step approach for companies, which is to: avoid manual handling by implementing automated processes where possible; assess the risk of injury where it cannot be avoided; and reduce the risk so far as is practicably possible.

The risk of injury can be significantly reduced or, in some cases, even

removed through the successful introduction of dedicated manual handling equipment. Conveyor belts and hand trucks can be used for the transportation of heavy loads, taking the strain off the individual, and pallet lift tables can assist in lifting and lowering goods by removing the need to bend at all. Much of this equipment is featured in the Barloworld catalogue, with specific solutions to aid any manual handling operation.

Employers and staff benefit from handling equipment which helps to reduce the risk of injury but it can also help to speed up operations, boosting staff morale and overall productivity.

However, the investment in equipment could prove useless without providing sufficient training and a level of understanding to support it. Training is a valuable preventative measure ensuring individuals are fully equipped and qualified to perform daily tasks correctly and safely. Providing the required training for any job is a legal obligation and an effective way to enforce safety regulations and practices.

According to the HSE, the average number of sick days resulting from back pains can be up to 20 days, so adequate training also presents economic benefits to the company, by reducing staff absenteeism. This cuts the unnecessary additional costs of replacement staff, sick pay or, in

extreme cases, compensation payouts.

Courses are available to help managers identify possible risks which could occur during a manual handling operation and how to avoid or prevent them. For the employee, Barloworld's half-day to two-day kinetic courses meet the Directive requirements and HSE guidelines for handling techniques to reduce the risk of injury. A variety of courses can be carried out on site at a company's premises or at any of Barloworld's nationwide training centres.

With all the available preventative

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measures to literally take the strain out of manual handling, there is simply no excuse for such a high rate of injury. Of course, with consideration to the human element, there will always be possible risks to consider in manual handling operations. However, by assessing and then minimising risk through a combination of appropriate equipment, a sufficient level of training and continued supervision, more companies and their employees will be better equipped to avoid the risks and reduce the HSE injury statistics. ●

