



## How to Avoid a \$1 Million Hazardous Manual Task Injury

You might not expect that stacking goods on the shelves of a supermarket could result in an injury where the Court recently awarded a worker \$1 million for damages. But the injury was quite severe.

The Judge concluded that the training and supervision given to the worker was inadequate.

This article looks at 2 common elements that can influence the severity of a manual task injury and sets out the WHS legal requirements for hazardous manual tasks.

### The Severity of a Hazardous Manual Task Injury

Here are 2 common elements that can influence the severity of the injury.

1. There are 5 key risk factors in a hazardous manual task. They are;
  - repetitive or sustained force
  - high or sudden force
  - repetitive movement
  - sustained or awkward posture
  - exposure to vibration

If two or more of these risk factors are combined in the same incident then the likelihood of an injury occurring increases and so will the potential for the severity of the injury. In the “stacking shelves” incident the worker came down the “moveable step” forward instead of backward and suffered injury to ankle, hip and shoulder. The combination of high and sudden force with awkward posture may well have aggravated the severity of the injury.

2. Another element that can contribute to the severity of an injury may not be obvious even in a risk assessment of a manual task. This is because most manual task injuries are the result of wear and tear of the body over a period of time. As explained on page 3 of SafeWork NSWs’ Code of Practice on Hazardous Manual Tasks :

“MSDs (musculoskeletal disorders) occur in two ways:

- gradual wear and tear to joints, ligaments, muscles and inter-vertebral discs caused by repeated or continuous use of the same body parts, including static body positions

- sudden damage caused by strenuous activity, or unexpected movements such as when loads being handled move or change position suddenly.

Injuries can also occur due to a combination of these mechanisms, for example, body tissue that has been weakened by cumulative damage may be vulnerable to sudden injury by lower forces.”

### **How to Minimise the Risk of Hazardous Manual Task Injuries**

The best way to minimise the risk of hazardous manual tasks is to follow the guidance in [SafeWork NSW's Code of Practice on Hazardous Manual Tasks](#).

The Code sets out the WHS legal requirements for dealing with handling hazardous manual tasks, how to comply with these requirements, and how to minimise the risk of injuries.

You may find 2 articles on our website a good place to start your journey. They are, [What Makes a Manual Task Hazardous?](#) and, [Manual Handling Training](#). Just click on the title.

### **Note:**

Courtenell delivers a very popular 2 hour manual handling training course that addresses the specific manual tasks of the attendees and covers:

- doing their tasks with the least risk,
- recognizing the risks and the best way to do their tasks
- stretch exercises that reduce the risk of injury
- manual handling responsibilities that apply in a workplace

[Click here for more details.](#)

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