



What Makes a Manual Task Hazardous?

Five Key Risk Factors

One or more of the following 5 risk factors will mean the manual task is hazardous and can cause injury to a worker.

The term *hazardous manual task* is defined in NSW WHS Regulation 5 as: a task that requires a person to lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain any person, animal or thing that involves 1 or more of the following:

1. Repetitive or sustained force
 - Repetitive force is using force repeatedly over a period of time to move or support an object
 - Sustained force is when force is applied continually over a period of time
2. High or sudden force
 - High force occurs in tasks that are very demanding physically, or a worker needs help because of the effort, or a stronger person or 2 people are needed for the task
 - Sudden force occurs in tasks involving jerky or unexpected movements or when force has to be used suddenly
3. Repetitive movement
 - Using the same parts of the body to repeat similar movements over a period of time eg typing and other keyboard tasks
4. Sustained or awkward posture
 - Sustained posture is where part or all of the body is kept in the same position for a prolonged period eg at a workstation
 - Awkward posture is where any part of the body is in an uncomfortable or unnatural position
5. Exposure to vibration.
 - Whole body vibration is when vibration is transmitted through a supporting surface such as a seat or floor to the whole body
 - Hand-arm vibration is when vibration is transmitted to the hand or arm from a vibrating tool or steering wheel or controls in heavy machinery

Manual Task Injuries to Workers Occur in Two Ways

1. Gradual wear and tear to joints, ligaments, muscles, and discs between the vertebrae of the spine, caused by repeated or continuous use of the same body parts, including static body positions
2. 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.

WorkCover Statistics

WorkCover notes* that these injuries in NSW are the most common cause of injury:

- accounting for 30% of workplace injuries
- cost \$110,000,000 in workers compensation claims annually
- involved 78,338 weeks of time lost

How to Handle Hazardous Manual Tasks

You can find essential guidance material on the identification, assessment, and control of the risks of hazardous manual tasks in the Hazardous Manual Tasks Code of Practice. This is a SafeWork Australia Code of Practice that was approved and adopted by WorkCover NSW in 2012.

This article is mainly based on material in that Code of Practice.

You are welcome to download this article and distribute it within your organisation.

* WorkCover NSW "Statistical Bulletin 2012/13 NSW Workers Compensation Statistics".