

Manual Handling

The largest single cause of lost working days in construction

Musculoskeletal disorders do not make the news the way a fall does, but they end more careers than anything else on site. Backs, shoulders and knees wear out under repeated loading, and once the damage is done it tends to stay done.

Scope and limitations — read before use

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1. The duty — avoid, assess, reduce

Order	Requirement	On site
1	AVOID hazardous manual handling so far as reasonably practicable	Order materials in smaller units. Have them delivered to the point of use. Use a telehandler, pallet truck, wheelbarrow, kerb lifter, vacuum lifter or trolley.
2	ASSESS what cannot be avoided	Use the TILE headings below. Write it down for the routine tasks.
3	REDUCE the risk of injury so far as reasonably practicable	Mechanical aids, two-person lifts, better layout, shorter carries, task rotation.

There is no legal maximum weight. Weight is only one factor — a 15 kg kerb at arm's length below knee height in the wet is far worse than 25 kg held close on level ground.

2. TILE assessment

Heading	Ask
Task	Does it involve twisting, stooping, reaching upwards, long carrying distances, repetitive handling, or insufficient rest? Is it pushing or pulling?
Individual	Does it need unusual strength or height? Is the person pregnant, or do they have a health condition or recent injury? Are they trained?
Load	Is it heavy, bulky, unwieldy, hard to grip, unstable, sharp, hot or cold?

Environment	Space constraints, uneven or slippery ground, poor lighting, extremes of temperature, wind, working at height, steps.
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3. The usual culprits on a construction site

Task	Why it hurts people	Practical control	In place? Y/N
Handling kerbs and flags	Heavy, awkward, low starting position, often in the wet	Mechanical kerb lifter or vacuum lifter. Two-person lift as a minimum. Never lift alone.	
Carrying blocks and bricks	Repetitive, heavy, long carries	Deliver to point of use, use a brick tongs or barrow, restrict to lighter blocks where specified.	
Bags of cement, sand and aggregate	25 kg repeatedly, awkward grip	Smaller bags where available, sack truck, mechanical handling, split loads.	
Handling scaffold tube and boards	Long, heavy, awkward, often at height	Team lifts, mechanical hoisting, plan the sequence.	
Drainage pipes and manhole rings	Very heavy, round, unstable	Lifting equipment only. Never manhandle.	
Plasterboard and sheet materials	Bulky, unwieldy, catches the wind	Board lifter or panel trolley, two-person handling, avoid in wind.	
Tools and equipment in and out of vans	Repetitive, bent posture, from height	Racking at waist height, ramps, trolleys.	
Digging and shovelling by hand	Sustained awkward posture, repetitive loading	Mechanical excavation where possible, rotate the task, correct tool length.	
Working in trenches and confined spaces	Restricted posture, no room to lift properly	Plan the method, use lifting aids designed for the space, limit duration.	
Kneeling for screeding, tiling, floor work	Knee damage, sustained posture	Knee pads, kneeling boards, rotate the task, raise the work where possible.	

4. Assessment record

Task assessed	Date	Assessed by	Risk (H/M/L)	Controls introduced	Residual risk	Review

CONSTRUCTION SITE SAFETY

Assessed by	Signature	Date	Review date