

Health and Safety

for congregations

Manual handling



How this guide can help you

Many tasks are performed everyday by our congregations involve manual handling, activities such as carrying boxes of copy paper, retrieving archive boxes, transporting audio visual sound equipment, moving pews, tables and chairs. If done incorrectly tasks which involve carrying, pushing and pulling can lead to risk of injury.

This guide provides information about how to identify, assess and minimise risks associated with manual handling.

Hazardous manual tasks and musculoskeletal disorders

Hazardous manual tasks refer to any activity that requires:

- Repetitive or sustained force
- Sudden force
- Repetitive movement
- Sustained or awkward posture
- Exposure to vibration

Hazardous manual tasks can cause musculoskeletal disorders. A musculoskeletal disorder is an injury or a disease of the musculoskeletal system. A musculoskeletal disorder may include:

- Sprains and strains of muscles, ligaments and tendons
- Back injuries, including damage to the muscles, tendons, ligaments, spinal discs, nerves, joints and bones
- Joint and bone injuries or degeneration, often affecting the shoulder, elbow, wrist, hip, knee, ankle, hands and feet
- Nerve injuries or compression (e.g. carpal tunnel syndrome)
- Muscular and vascular disorders as a result of hand-arm vibration
- Soft tissue injuries including hernias

Managing risks associated with manual handling

In order to manage risks associated with hazardous manual tasks it is important to adopt a risk management approach. For further information on risk management refer to the 'how to manage health and safety risks guide' found [here](#), our risk management procedure is also found [here](#), and our video on the risk management process is found [here](#).

Identify hazardous manual tasks- find out what could cause harm

- Consulting with the staff, volunteers and contractors who perform manual tasks for the congregation can provide valuable information about discomfort or muscular aches and pains they experience performing tasks. This information can be used to help identify potential hazards.
- It can also be helpful to examine past incident records (if you have any) to identify manual handling risks

Hazards may also be identified by looking at where work is done and how work is carried out. Remember to look for tasks where there is repetitive or sustained force, sudden force, repetitive movement, sustained or awkward posture and/or exposure to vibration.

Assess the risk

If hazardous manual tasks are identified, a risk assessment should be performed. Hazards have the potential to cause minor discomforts, through to a serious injury. A risk assessment helps us understand the nature of the harm that could be caused by the hazard, how serious the harm could be, and the likelihood of it happening. When performing a risk assessment, you should involve the people who do the tasks. You will need to rate the risk high, medium or low. Refer to our risk management guide found [here](#) to assess the risk of manual handling in your congregation.

Controlling the risk

The best way to avoid sprains and strains is to avoid doing the task as this would eliminate the risk. If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risk, implement the most effective control measures. We have provided some examples of controls on the following pages. This list is not exhaustive, and controls you implement will need to reflect your specific circumstances.





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Controlling the risk continued...

Eliminate:

- Having goods delivered directly to the point of use
- Purchasing equipment so that lifting, pulling or moving task is no longer needed

Substitution:

- Replace heavy items with lighter, smaller or easier to handle items (be aware of the risk of increased repetition)
- Replace hand tools with power tools to reduce the level of force required to do the task

Engineering:

- Use mechanical lifting aids and trolleys (that are properly maintained)
- Design work areas to include storage and to minimise the need to lift and move things
- Provide workstations that are height adjustable

Administrative:

- Use a team to lift heavy items; "two are better than one because they have good reward for their labour" Ecclesiastes 4:9
- Rotate workers between different tasks and ensure they get breaks
- Use safe lifting techniques
- Set up your desk ergonomically
- Store heavy things at torso height

Personal Protective Equipment

- Wear flat non-slip footwear when lifting or moving heavy loads

Training and instruction

Staff and other workers need to be made aware of correct manual handling procedures at induction and on an ongoing basis. Evidence indicates that this training alone as a control method to reduce risk of musculoskeletal injury is not effective.

Training is however effective when it includes information on:

- Identifying hazards and risks associated with manual handling
- Strategies to avoid manual handling hazards and how to prevent injury
- How to develop controls to minimise harm associated with manual handling
- How to report hazards and risks associated with manual handling

Monitoring and reviewing control measures

Control measures that have been implemented should be monitored and reviewed. If necessary, these should be revised to ensure they work as planned. You should review control measures:

- If someone reports difficulty with a task, discomfort or an injury
- When new tasks or activities are planned or new equipment is purchased
- When the control measure is no longer effective
- If a new manual handling hazard is identified
- If consultation indicates a review of manual handling controls is necessary
- When you review your risk register

Additional information - ergonomics

When working at a desk, also be sure to set it up ergonomically - refer to the guide found [here](#). Some helpful information has also been provided [here](#) to help you lift safely.

