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Manual Handling

Manual Handling has been defined as: “Any handling task involving the human body as the power source”. Using that definition Manual Handling includes any activity that requires lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying and holding. These are common activities in FM particularly in mailrooms, kitchens, churn and all forms of maintenance.

Injuries arising from poor manual handling include back strains, muscle sprains, slipped discs as well as cuts, burns, bruises and grazes. Manual handling accidents account for over 38% of all lost time accidents at work and absence from work due to back pain is second only to the common cold.

The key legislation is the Manual Handling Operations Regulations (1992) which place duties on employers and employees. Facilities managers must examine the manual handling activities of their teams and try to ensure that that any manual handling task that cannot be eliminated and that is likely to be a risk to health and safety is examined and assessed.

The Manual Handling Assessment Chart (MAC) tool was developed by the HSE and can be used to assess common risk factors in lifting, lowering, carrying and team handling operations. The HSE website contains a section on the MAC tool including case studies and worked examples. The MAC tool is designed to help users understand, interpret and categorise the level of risk of the various known risk factors associated with manual handling activities. It incorporates a numerical and a colour coding scoring system to highlight high-risk manual handling activities.

For each type of assessment there is a guide and a flow chart to help. The flow chart moves, step by step, through each element of the operation enabling evaluation and grading of the level of risk. To calculate the risk for the load and frequency of the operation, a graph is supplied with the flowchart which indicates the appropriate colour band and numerical value to be entered into the score sheet.

Appropriate training should be provided including advice on manual handling risk factors and how injuries can occur as well as how to carry out safe manual handling, including good handling techniques. The training should address appropriate systems of work for the individual's task and environment and any use of mechanical aids with practical work to allow the trainer to identify and put right anything the trainee is not doing safely.

An interactive version of the MAC score sheet is available on the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk/msd/mac which totals the respective scores from the colour bands.