

SAFETY TALK

— Ergonomics

Safe Lifting

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE LIFTING

How you lift is just as important as what you lift. Even a light load can cause injury if lifted improperly. Before you start a lift ask yourself these questions:

- Are your muscles warmed up? If it's 8:00 in the morning and you've just got in, think about warming up your muscles before tackling that lift. Muscles, tendons, and ligaments are more flexible after a good warm up.
- Can you lift the weight? Know and respect your capabilities. Ask for assistance when necessary.
- Should you use a mechanical aid, such as a cart or dolly? Carts should be used if you're transporting materials a long distance.
- Is a team lift the way to go?
- Is your path of travel clear? Know what you are about to lift, how you will lift the object, and make sure your path of travel is clear.
- Are you wearing good sturdy footwear to keep you stable?

TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND

Consider job rotation, two-person lifts, or mechanical lifts whenever a job requires the following lifting conditions:

- More than 75 pounds once per day
- 55 pounds more than 10 times per day
- 10 pounds more than twice per minute for more than two hours per day
- 25 pounds above the shoulders, below the knees, or at arm's length for more than 25 times per day

REPORTING ERGONOMIC HAZARDS

As with other workplace hazards, if you become aware of a suspected ergonomic hazard, report the hazard to your immediate supervisor.

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) can occur from a single event, such as a strain from a lift or result from the buildup of tissue damage from many small injuries or micro-traumas. The symptoms associated with MSDs may include:

- Pain from movement, pressure, or exposure to cold or vibration
- Change in skin color from exposure to cold or vibration
- Numbness or tingling in an arm, leg, finger, or especially the finger tips at night
- Decreased range of motion
- Decreased grip strength
- Swelling of a joint or part of the arm, hand, finger, or leg
- Fatigue or difficulty in sustaining performance, particularly of the small muscle groups

In all cases, make sure to support your lower back (lumbar). If you have an adjustable chair position the lumbar support at the curve of your lower back. When sitting on the sofa or a lounge chair, you can use a rolled up towel or pillow.

HOW TO AVOID BACK INJURY

- Stand as close as possible to the object you are going to lift.
- Position your feet shoulder width apart with one foot slightly behind the other.
- Squat down to the load. Bend at your knees, not at your waist.
- Grip the object firmly with both hands (not just your fingers) and keep your arms and elbows tucked in close to your body for more strength.
- Use handles, if provided.
- Tighten your stomach muscles as you grasp the load securely. Maintain a comfortable position, keeping the normal curve of the lower back.
- Keep your head and chin up as you lift.
- Lift with your legs; they are the strongest muscles. Lift smoothly and keep the load close to your body. Do not twist your body while carrying objects. If you need to change directions, move your feet in the direction of travel.
- Always push, rather than pull carts and hand trucks, so less force is placed on your lower back muscles. Avoid storing heavy items above shoulder level or below knee level, if possible.