TOOLBOX TALK AWARENESS PACKAGES

HAZ-MAN · Hazardous Manual Tasks Awareness

Product Overview

Audience: All workers · Duration: 20–30 minutes

Version 1.0 · 8 November 2026

For workers who lift, push, pull, carry or hold: what makes a manual task hazardous, and why changing the task works better than lifting technique.

Musculoskeletal disorders such as back, shoulder and neck injuries are among the most common serious work injuries in Australia. They come from hazardous manual tasks: tasks involving repetitive or sustained force, high or sudden force, repetitive movement, sustained or awkward postures, or vibration. In Victoria this is called hazardous manual handling.

This talk teaches workers to recognise the characteristics that make a task hazardous, explains why controls that change the task (eliminating, redesigning, mechanical aids) work better than training in lifting technique, and encourages early reporting of discomfort.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session participants will be able to:

- Explain what a hazardous manual task is, and the characteristics that make it so: force, repetition, sustained or awkward postures, and vibration
- Describe musculoskeletal disorders and how they can develop gradually or from a single event
- Explain why changing the task, the workplace layout or the load, or using mechanical aids, controls the risk better than lifting technique alone
- Use the mechanical aids and team lifting arrangements provided, and report when they are missing or unsuitable
- Recognise early signs of discomfort and report them before they become an injury
- Take part in consultation about how manual tasks could be done differently

What it covers

Module	Covers
What makes a task hazardous	The five characteristics; Load, environment and work organisation; Musculoskeletal disorders
Controls that work	Eliminate the task; Redesign the workplace, the load and the task; Mechanical aids; Why technique training is not enough on its own
Your part	Using aids every time; Reporting discomfort early; Suggesting changes

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Activities

- Task check: workers assess a common task in their own workplace against the five characteristics
- Redesign it: in groups, workers suggest two changes that would reduce the risk of that task

What is in the package

Item	File
Editable PowerPoint presentation with speaker notes, plus PDF	02_TRAINING_PRESENTATION/Training Presentation.pptx and .pdf
Facilitator guide with a running sheet, discussion prompts and model answers	03_FACILITATOR_GUIDE/Facilitator Guide.docx and .pdf
Participant handout with the key points to take away	04_PARTICIPANT_HANDOUT/Participant Handout.docx and .pdf
Attendance record form, to capture who attended, when, and who facilitated	06_RECORDS/Attendance Record.docx and .pdf
Excel attendance register	06_RECORDS/Attendance Register.xlsx
Multiple-choice theory assessment, to record understanding if your business wants to	05_ASSESSMENT/Theory Assessment.docx and .pdf
Answer key for the assessment	05_ASSESSMENT/Assessment Answer Key.docx and .pdf
Certificate template	06_RECORDS/Certificate Template.docx
Start here: Read Me First, Product Overview, Permitted Use Terms, Version Information	01_START_HERE/ (four PDFs)

What you need to deliver it

- A facilitator such as a supervisor, leading hand or WHS adviser who has read the facilitator guide and knows your site's arrangements for the topic
- A screen or projector, or printed slides or handouts: it works in a crib room, site office or on a video call
- Your own site procedures for the topic, to point to during the session

Questions

Can we add our own site procedures and photos? Yes. The slides, handout and guide are editable, and the facilitator guide marks the places to add your own procedures, contacts and photos of your workplace.

Do we have to use the assessment? No. It is there if your business wants a record that each worker understood the key points. The attendance record on its own shows who attended and when.

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TOOLBOX TALK

Hazardous Manual Tasks Awareness

What makes a manual task hazardous, and why changing the task works better than lifting technique

20–30 minutes · All workers

[Company name] · [Date] · [Facilitator name]

MAN

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What this talk is, and is not

This talk covers

- ✓ What makes a manual task hazardous
- ✓ How musculoskeletal disorders develop
- ✓ Controls that change the task
- ✓ Your part: aids, reporting, ideas

This talk is not

- ✕ Forklift or crane training, or a licence
- ✕ Training to use a specific hoist or aid
- ✕ A risk or ergonomic assessment
- ✕ Our procedure: **[Our manual tasks procedure]**

Awareness only. Forklifts and cranes need a high risk work licence; every mechanical aid needs training on that aid.

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What makes a task hazardous

A manual task is any task where you lift, lower, push, pull, carry, move, hold or restrain something or someone. It is hazardous when it involves:

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

Also look at

- The load: heavy, bulky, unstable, hard to grip, or a person or animal
- The environment: slippery floors, steps, heat, cold, poor lighting, tight spaces
- Work organisation: pace, deadlines, long shifts, too few people, no breaks

Weight is only part of it. Force, repetition, posture and vibration all count.

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Musculoskeletal disorders

A musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) is an injury or disease of the muscles, tendons, ligaments, joints, nerves, discs or bones.

- Back, neck and shoulder injuries; sprains and strains; hernias; nerve damage
- Gradual: wear and tear builds up over weeks or years, often starting as aches and stiffness
- Sudden: a single event, such as a slip while carrying or a load that shifts
- Many cause lasting pain, time off work, and changes to life outside work

The injury that 'happened on one lift' usually started long before.

A composite example

- A storeperson lifts cartons off a pallet on the floor all shift, bending and twisting to reach the far side.
- Months of lower back ache are put down to 'getting older'. One morning a carton slips and the back goes.

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Duties under WHS or OHS laws

The business must

- Identify hazardous manual tasks and manage the risks
- Eliminate the risk, or change the task, the workplace or the load
- Provide and maintain mechanical aids, and train workers to use them
- Consult workers about how tasks could be done differently

You must

- Use the mechanical aids and team lifting arrangements provided
- Follow the safe ways of working agreed for the task
- Report discomfort, injuries, and missing or unsuitable aids
- Take part in consultation, and suggest changes

In Victoria this is called hazardous manual handling, with similar duties under the OHS laws. Check yours.

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TOOLBOX TALK · HAZ-MAN

Hazardous Manual Tasks Awareness

Participant handout · keep this

Musculoskeletal disorders, such as back, shoulder and neck injuries, are among the most common serious work injuries in Australia. Most come from hazardous manual tasks. Keep this page.

A task is hazardous when it involves

1. Repetitive or sustained force
2. High or sudden force
3. Repetitive movement
4. Sustained or awkward posture
5. Exposure to vibration

Also look at

- The load: heavy, bulky, unstable, hard to grip
- The environment: floors, stairs, heat, light, space
- Work organisation: pace, shifts, staffing, breaks

The order of controls

1. Eliminate the task
2. A lighter, smaller or easier load
3. Conveyors and automated handling
4. Mechanical aids; redesign heights, reach and layout
5. Rotation, breaks, team lifting, technique
6. PPE: does little for the main risk

Technique is not enough on its own

- It relies on getting it right every lift. Change the task first; technique goes on top

Task check

- ☐ Repetitive or sustained force?
- ☐ High or sudden force?
- ☐ Repetitive movement?
- ☐ Sustained or awkward posture?
- ☐ Exposure to vibration?
- ☐ Can the task be avoided?
- ☐ Can the load be lighter or smaller?
- ☐ Can the height or reach change?
- ☐ Is there an aid for this?

Every time

- Use the aid, even for 'just one'
- Plan team lifts
- Aids: **[Where our mechanical aids are kept]**

Report early

- Aches, stiffness, tingling or pain
- Missing, broken or unsuitable aids
- Ideas to change a task
- Report to: **[Who to report to here]**

Change the task, not just the way you lift. Report discomfort early.

This is awareness training. It is not a licence, a ticket, a permit or a competency. It does not train you to use a forklift, crane, hoist or other mechanical aid.

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