

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Cleaning industry - Manual tasks

Why are manual tasks a problem?

Manual tasks are any tasks that require a person to lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move or restrain something. These tasks can result in serious injuries, particularly to the back. Injuries can happen as a result of a 'one-off' event, but more often they are the result of stress and strain over a long period of time.

Some examples of manual tasks common to the cleaning industry are:

- lifting and carrying heavy equipment
- pushing and pulling mops, brooms or vacuum cleaners
- stacking cleaning chemicals and materials on shelves
- bending and twisting to clean under and behind fixtures and fittings
- stretching to load rubbish into bins
- holding, controlling or restraining scrubbing and polishing machines.

Characteristics of the area where the cleaning is conducted can increase the danger, for example:

- slippery floors
- cluttered spaces
- having to clean around fixtures and furnishings
- working in restricted spaces
- needing to carry equipment from vehicles
- needing to move equipment up and down stairs

Some possible manual tasks solutions

The best way to reduce the risk of injury is to avoid manual tasks wherever possible. However, this is generally not possible and you will need to find ways of doing the tasks to reduce risks as much as possible.

Some possible solutions include:

- using mechanical aids to move heavy objects (e.g. trolleys, pallet jacks or fork lifts)
- providing lightweight buckets and rubbish bins that are fitted with wheels
- using portable ramps for unloading cleaning equipment or materials from vehicles
- buying cleaning agents in smaller or lighter cartons or drums
- ensuring larger drums are fitted with taps and supporting shelves to support the drum and smaller containers when transferring (decanting) into a smaller container
- organising work to reduce double handling, such as having the materials delivered to the place where they will be used and stored
- storing frequently used or heavy items on middle shelves and lighter items on higher shelves
- selecting appropriate cleaning methods for non-slip floors (e.g. slip resistant floors can be very difficult to mop)
- using automated cleaning methods (e.g. robotic auto scrubbers)
- buying lighter or smaller machines
- reviewing the use of back mounted vacuum cleaners. These can create

problems when lifting them or bending (e.g. when unplugging them) because of the additional weight on the upper body.

- ensuring machines have adjustable handles
- using padded handles on machinery to reduce vibration
- providing long-handled tools, step ladders or extension handles etc. for workers to clean high or low areas without excessive reaching, stretching or bending
- ensuring step ladders are only used when the user can maintain three points of contact with the ladder and that they don't need to climb the ladder carrying tools or equipment. Assistance from a second person may be necessary.
- negotiating with clients to ensure that bins aren't overloaded and that excess items and equipment aren't stored where they will need to be moved for cleaning
- ensuring that any spills are cleaned up immediately

- sharing tasks between workers so that workers are not doing one task for long periods
- training workers on the correct way to do tasks, including the use of equipment and machinery
- providing workers with detailed information about each workplace where they work
- ensuring all equipment and machinery is serviced regularly
- providing workers with non-slip shoes and other appropriate personal protective equipment when needed.

For more information on manual tasks and other workplace health and safety issues call 1300 369 915 or visit

www.worksafe.qld.gov.au

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