

Construction Safety Matters

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The Importance of Safe Lifting

Lifting is a common activity at the worksite, and it is often forgotten that there are proper techniques that need to be followed to avoid injury. In fact, lower back injuries—which are often associated with poor lifting practices—are the most common work-related injury cited by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Safe Lifting Basics

Safe lifting plays an important role in keeping your back healthy and you safe. There are several safe lifting techniques that can help take strain off the lower back area:

- Look over the load. Decide if you can handle it alone or if you need assistance.
- When in doubt, ask for help. Moving an object that is too heavy or bulky can cause severe injury.
- Clear away any potential obstacles before beginning to carry the object.
- Support and propel the object while carrying it; your grip should be firm. Carrying objects will change your balance. To keep this change of balance to a minimum, keep the load close to your body and to your normal center of gravity, between the legs and shoulders.
- Use good foot positioning. Your feet should be shoulder width apart, with one foot beside and the other foot behind the object that you are going to lift. This allows you to use the full power of your leg muscles. Leg muscles are stronger and more powerful than back muscles, so let your legs do the work.
- Bend your knees. Bending over at the waist to reach for the object you want to lift puts strain on your back, shoulder and neck muscles.
- Keep your arms and elbows as close to your body as you can while lifting. If you have to stretch your arms out completely away from your body, ask for assistance with the lift.
- Use your feet to change direction. Don't twist your body. Twisting adds to the stress of the lift and affects your balance.
- To lower the object, bend your knees as you did to pick it up. To place the load on a cart or other elevated surface, set it on the edge and slide it into position. Make sure your hands and feet are clear when lowering the load.

Safe lifting of heavy objects requires training and practice. And when equipment is available, it should be used to lift and carry heavy objects. Loaders, forklifts and hoists are designed for this purpose.

Team Lifting

When another person is helping you lift, teamwork is very important. If you're going to be carrying the load to another location, both of you should coordinate this prior to lifting the object. Check the route and clearance. One worker needs to be in a position to observe and direct the other. Lifting and lowering should be done in unison. Don't let the load drop suddenly without warning your partner.

Your Safety is Important

Proper lifting methods protect against injury and make continued work much easier. It is important to think about what you are going to do before lifting an object—over time, these safe lifting techniques will become habit.

Contact your supervisor if you have any questions or concerns regarding safe lifting techniques.
