

Lifting and Material Handling

Construction Safety Talks from Liberty Mutual Insurance



In English

En español

Some things to know before you give your talk:

As a supervisor, you know that handling construction materials is a routine part of the job. Your crew has to lift and carry many objects every day. These include items that are heavy, large, awkward, or difficult because they have been handled repeatedly for many hours.

Materials handling is one reason so many construction workers experience back injuries. About one in four workers who lose time from work suffer from an injury caused by handling materials.

Your crew has probably all heard about the “right” way to lift knees bent and back straight. Do you really think that works? Is it really possible on the job to always lift exactly that way? No.

What can you do to reduce the chances of back injuries? Think of the toughest handling jobs at the site. Once you locate the toughest jobs, think about ways to make them easier. Maybe that means getting a mechanical device. Or maybe it means having suppliers deliver the materials closer to where they will be used. Sometimes it means asking for help from another worker.

What about those situations where workers are stuck having to lift, push, or carry something by themselves? Tell the crew about these common-sense rules:

- **Lift Comfortably:** Choose the position that feels best — with or without a straight back.
- **Avoid Unnecessary Bending:** Do not place materials on the ground if they must be picked up again later. Use a table, platform, or other elevated surface.
- **Avoid Twisting:** Turn your feet, not your hips or shoulders. Shift your feet to face the location where the material is to be lifted from or placed. Never twist and bend at the same time.
- **Avoid Reaching Out:** Handle heavy objects close to the body. Avoid picking up an object with your arms fully extended. Get help with bulky loads.
- **Avoid Excessive Weights:** If the load is heavy, do not try to handle it yourself. Get help or use a mechanical device. This is not a weight-lifting contest.
- **Lift Gradually:** Lift smoothly. Avoid jerking to lift or pull a load. Get a good grip on an object to prevent it from slipping. Many injuries occur when trying to “catch” a load that is slipping.
- **Get Help Positioning Materials:** Large and bulky materials are difficult to hold in place while lining up the hole for the first screw or bolt. Using your hip, shoulder, or elbow can lead to a strain injury. Ask for help from a fellow worker; get a mechanical device to hold the materials.
- **Stay in Good Physical Shape:** Get proper exercise. Sit-ups with knees bent are particularly good for the back.

Try This for Show and Tell

Demonstrate some safe lifting techniques and have the crew do them along with you. Discuss job operations where lifting could be eliminated or improved.

Show material handling devices available on the job.

Questions You Can Use to Get Them Talking

- What do you do when something on the job is too heavy to lift by yourself?
- What do you think are the heaviest and most difficult items to handle on this job?
- Do we have enough mechanical aids available?
Do we need more or a different type?
- Has anyone ever been injured, or know of someone who has, because they did not lift something correctly or lifted something that was too heavy for them?

How this talk applies to my crew:

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