

HSE SAFETY CORNERSTONES

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Manual Handling Assessment Proven to Work

Recent research undertaken by the HSE and the Health and Safety Laboratory (an independent agency of the HSE offering health and safety research) conclusively proves the efficacy of the HSE's Manual Handling Assessment Tool (MAC tool). The MAC tool helps employers and managers assess the risks posed by lifting, carrying and team manual handling activities. It helps users understand, interpret and categorise the level of risk of the various known risk factors associated with manual handling activities.

The HSE study aimed to ascertain whether the MAC tool could predict how much time workers would lose from work due to lower back pain caused by improper manual handling techniques—and the report succeeded by providing a ratio for how much time employees would miss from work due to lower back pain.

The report suggests that, as 'hand distance from the lower back' increased during any act of manual handling (such as lifting and carrying), the risk of lost time due to lower back pain increased. For each 10 centimetre increase between the hand and lower back during manual handling, the rate of lost time due to lower back pain increased by approximately 20 per cent. In other words, the farther away your employees' hands are from their lower back when picking up or carrying something, the more they risk losing time from work due to lower back pain directly attributable to incorrect manual handling.

The results are clear—there is a quantifiable link between poor manual handling and time spent away from work due to lower back pain.

To help lower your business' cost of working days lost to poor manual handling and lower back pain, communicate the study's ratio to your employees and utilise the HSE's MAC tool. The MAC tool can benefit businesses across all industries, since most business operations require its employees to undertake some manual handling tasks.

The MAC tool classifies manual handling tasks in the following four groups according to risk:

1. **Green (G)** signifies a low level of risk that could be hazardous to vulnerable groups such as younger workers.
2. **Amber (A)** signifies a medium level of risk that requires you to examine tasks closely.
3. **Red (R)** signifies a high level of risk that requires prompt action.
4. **Purple (P)** signifies a very high level of risk that represents a serious risk of injury.

Begin your assessment by observing or videotaping the task and make sure what you are viewing is representative of normal working procedures—soliciting feedback from employees will help. Then select the appropriate type of assessment (lifting, carrying or team handling) in the MAC tool and follow the associated flow chart to determine the level of risk for each risk factor. For detailed step-by-step instructions, click here: www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg383.pdf.

By relying on the MAC tool, your business can accurately assess your employees' manual handling risk, provide employees with quantifiable proof of the need to properly conduct manual handling tasks, and slash costs due to lower back pain and injury.

Employee Monitoring Policies

In December 2014 the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT), a tribunal public body responsible for hearing appeals from Employment Tribunals, dismissed an employee's claim that his privacy had been infringed by his employer and confirmed, more generally, employers' rights to monitor workplace emails and Internet use when a clear policy is in place.

The employer performed a routine check on the employee's email and Internet use when he uncovered that the employee had been sending overtly sexual messages to a friend he hoped to find a position for at the company from his work email. When the employer began disciplinary proceedings for email misuse, the employee promptly resigned, alleging that the employer violated his privacy by accessing his company email.

After analysing the employer's Internet and Email Acceptable Use Policy, the EAT dismissed the employee's claim, ruling that the policy clearly stated that the employer may, at any time, access employees' email and Internet usage. The policy dictated that all employees were bound by it, that their emails may be monitored, and that employees should not assume their work email is private.

The EAT case will likely serve as a precedent that employers may monitor employees, and as a testament to the importance of having a clear, well-written Internet and Email Acceptable Use Policy. By setting out unequivocally what email and Internet use is acceptable, the employer avoided a potentially disastrous and financially ruinous ruling.

Make sure your business is prepared for such claims by adopting a robust Internet and Email Acceptable Use Policy that guards against privacy infringement claims. Contact Andrew Bourne & Co today for more information on safeguarding your business.



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NEWS AND PROSECUTIONS

Manufacturing firm in court after worker loses arm

A Powys firm was fined £10,000 and ordered to pay £11,865 when a 59-year-old worker lost his arm during routine maintenance on an industrial saw. At the end of his 11-hour shift, the worker shut off the saw and went to clean out all the collected saw dust from the saw well when his sleeve got caught on the still-moving blade. Despite being rushed to hospital, doctors were unable to save the man's arm. Three months prior to the incident, the company was informed by a machine maintenance engineer that the machine should be taken out of service until it could be fitted with a safety break. After the accident, the company admitted that the accident would not have occurred had they performed the required maintenance.

Paper company fined after worker crushed by reel of paper

A Hertfordshire-based paper company was prosecuted and fined £13,500 and ordered to pay £1,200 after a 45-year-old worker was struck by a 3.2 tonne reel of paper. The worker sustained a double fracture to his pelvis and internal injuries after the paper reel was released into the container he was working in, trapping him between the reel and the bulkhead of the container. For his injuries, the worker spent almost a month in hospital and had to undergo a series of operations—only recently returning to work. The HSE found that the company failed to conduct proper risk assessments of the hazards that the workers would face. Had they performed the simple, compulsory risk assessments, this incident would have been avoided entirely.

Engineering firm fined after apprentice struck by hose

An Aberdeenshire firm has been prosecuted and fined £10,000 after a 16-year-old apprentice was injured when a pressurised hose struck his back. The apprentice suffered bruises and cuts when a hose struck his back while he was retrieving an item from his toolbox. After being taken to hospital, the apprentice made a full recovery and was able to return to work after five days. The HSE found that the incident was caused by the firm not properly outlining the pressure testing area and the court ruled that there was no safe system of work in place to prevent such accidents.