



# Materials Handling

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Picking up, moving, and putting materials in their place is Materials Handling. It is something we all do every day, and all too often, it is what someone is doing when they get hurt on the job. You don't have to be involved in materials handling very long to discover there is a hard way and an easier way to do things. To make materials handling safer and easier, look at the load, your footing and your hands to see if there could be a problem.

## The Load

Size of the load is not the only factor to consider in materials handling. How often you move it, and where you move it from and finally put it down are also important. The weight that a person can safely lift varies from person to person. You should never attempt to pick up a load that is heavier than you can manage. Get a buddy to help you or use a mechanical lift.

The size of the load is also important. We've all heard the sayings "lift with your legs, not your back" and "bend your knees not your back". That is generally good advice, but to follow it, you have to get the center of the load close to your body. A bulky load is harder to lift than a small load of the same weight because we can't get the center of the load close to our body.

You should try to keep the height of lifts somewhere between your knees and your heart. You can sometimes keep lifts within this target range by planning where you store items. If you put them down on the floor, you'll just have to pick them back up again.

How often you lift a load is also important. Five pounds may not seem like much of a load until you have to pick it up several hundred times a day.

Last, look at how stable the load is. Is it likely to shift or fall when you are trying to move it? An unstable load often contributes to injuries because the person carrying it tries to "catch" the load and ends up falling themselves or hurting their back, shoulder, arm, etc. Make sure your load is secure before you pick it up.

## Footing

Falls, trips and slips are common causes of injury during materials handling. You can help prevent this type of injury by keeping your work area floor clean, dry and free from trip hazards, and by wearing sturdy slip-resistant shoes. Footing can also lead to injury during materials handling if you don't move your feet enough. If you twist your back rather than take a step, you may be placing yourself at risk for a back injury. If you slide side-to-side rather than turn and walk, you may also be placing yourself at risk.

## **Hands**

Have you ever scraped your knuckles as you were carrying something through a door? Have you ever pinched your fingers or hand when you put down a load you were carrying? If you have, you know how important it is to make sure you have proper clearance for your hands. Have you ever worn a blister on your hands, or gotten splinters while carrying materials? Gloves can go a long way towards preventing some hand injuries. The right glove can also help you keep a good grip on the materials you are carrying. Gloves should fit well to keep from becoming a hazard to the wearer.

## **Materials Handling Safety Tips**

1. Never pick up loads bigger than you can safely handle.
2. Keep loads close to your body.
3. Frequent lifts of what seem like small.
4. Avoid twists and side-stepping; both of these can lead to back injuries.
5. Make sure you have adequate clearances for your hands and fingers, particularly going through doors.
6. Watch your fingers when you put down your load; don't pinch them.
7. Good-fitting work gloves can protect your hands from splinters, blisters, cuts and scratches.