

Safe Work Guideline

Safe Lifting and Material Handling

Prepared By:
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Effective Date:
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Revised By:
Don Doherty

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As with most other jurisdictions, Alberta has no specific law about the maximum weight a worker can lift safely because there are many other factors that can increase the risk of a back injury. These factors include:

- the distance between the front of your body and load you are lifting,
- the number of lifts you are repeatedly performing,
- the size and shape of the objects you lift,
- the distance you are carrying the object,
- the height you are lifting the object from and the height you are lifting the object to and
- your health and physical condition

Guidelines:

- Move loads of appropriate size, weight and shape only. Avoid large or bulky boxes. Keep loads small and compact. This will allow you to hold the load as close to body as possible to reduce the strain on muscles.
- Lighten the load in each box, bag or container. Do not overload. Try filling bags or boxes only ½ full.
- Choose containers or with good handles or handgrips on the sides so it is easier to position and grasp the load.
- Store or position loads at a height that puts the least stress on the body. The safest lifts are conducted between knuckle and shoulder height.
- Minimize bending to lift or shift a load. If the area where you are placing the load is low to the ground consider placing items on a raised platform to position the load higher and reduce the need to reach or bend.
- Avoid carrying, pushing or pulling loads for long distances. Use aids such as a carts or dolly. Where possible push or pull the load vs. lifting so worker can use body weight to apply force.
- Do not twist your waist or trunk while lifting, moving, pushing or pulling a load. Pivot with your feet instead. Twisting makes the back less stable. Ensure the area where you are lifting and placing the load is free of obstructions to avoid the need to reposition loads.

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- Ensure good footing (e.g. avoid lifting on wet or icy surfaces) and wear appropriate footwear for stability.
- Do not do repeated lifting (e.g. snow shoveling) after long periods of sitting or inactivity. Move around first to warm up your muscles before lifting. Pace your work. If possible, avoid more than 2 lifts per minute.
- Maintain the natural curve of your lower back when lifting, lowering or moving items. Avoid stooping positions or bending the back forward more than 30 degrees.
- Contract your abdominal or trunk muscles during lifting, lowering and moving activities.
- Staff returning from extended breaks should be allowed an acclimatization period to work up their strength to avoid injury.
- Build and maintain muscular endurance. Participate in exercise programs that emphasize cardiovascular and improving muscle strength.
- Change the workplace layout or organization of tasks to reduce distances for pushing, pulling and lifting tasks. For example load and unload closer to the building entrance where possible and store heavy items such as photocopy paper on the main level of the building.
- If the load is heavy or awkward use a mechanical aid or ask for help!
- Never lift a full desk, shelf or filing cabinet. Ask the user to empty these items before moving.
- Report any injury, symptom or incident of pain as soon as possible on the district Work Related Incident Record. For further information contact Occupational Health and Safety Coordinator at 842-8912