Get a Handle on Handcart Safety



It’s a rare workplace that doesn’t have some sort of handcart for moving stock and equipment. From wheelbarrows and furniture carts to dollies and pallet jacks, handcarts help workers perform jobs better and faster, and they also help to prevent back injuries caused by lifting heavy items.

What’s at Stake

Compared to a piece of heavy equipment, a handcart doesn’t seem like one of the big dangers of the workplace. But anyone who has ever operated one for any length of time will tell you there are a surprising number of ways workers may be injured.

You can be struck if the load falls off. You can receive a strained back or similar over-exertion injury by moving the handcart the wrong way. You can get hand cuts from the sharp edges of metal strapping used to secure the load, and foot injuries from handtrucks running over your foot. And many injuries occur when the operator loses control of the handcart on an incline and the cart rolls into another person.

What Could Go Wrong

A worker was carting a heavy load of equipment through a warehouse. As he rounded the corner of an aisle, he lost control of the cart. He tried to use the cart’s braking system, but the brakes were dysfunctional. The cart’s momentum propelled it forward and it crashed into some aisle shelving. Material fell from the shelves and struck the worker on the head, causing a concussion.

How to Protect Yourself

Here are some tips for the safe use of a handcart:

- Make sure the cart is in good mechanical condition, including its braking system. If equipment is faulty, remove it from service and report any problems. Repairs and maintenance should be carried out by qualified personnel only.
- Stack materials safely, keeping the center of gravity low and putting heavier objects on the bottom. Make sure the load cannot topple over, strapping it if necessary. Also keep it low enough so that you have a clear

view ahead. Don’t exceed the weight capacity of the handcart.
- Keep your feet clear of the wheels at all times, even when loading.
- Don’t operate the cart with wet or greasy hands.
- Don’t ride on a cart made for a walking operator, and never carry passengers.
- Watch where you’re going. Stick to the correct traffic lanes, and stop and look at intersections.
- Stay alert to pinch point hazards to prevent injuries to your hands.
- Push the cart rather than pulling it to prevent back injuries, unless the cart is designed for pulling.
- When loading or unloading handcarts, bend your knees instead of your back and don’t pick up more at once than you can easily handle.
- Keep the handcart ahead of you when you go down an incline.
- Stay away from the edges of loading docks or other platforms. Make sure the dock plate and landing strip are wide enough to accommodate the cart’s wheels.
- Wear the proper personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves and safety-toed footwear, as well as any other PPE required to protect against the material being handled or other workplace hazards.
- Park and store handcarts where they will not create tripping hazards, and don’t block exits or emergency equipment such as fire extinguishers.

Final Word

A handcart is a handy piece of equipment. It can save us from having to lift and carry heavy items. Just follow a few simple precautions to use them safely.