Is This How You Want Your Workers to Lift Heavy Objects?

What’s wrong with this picture?



The techniques the worker is using to lift this object are misguided. You can’t spell “misguided” without the letters m, s and d. MSD is also short for “musculoskeletal disorders,” a fancy term for strains and sprains to the lower back, shoulders and arms.

Moral: If you see workers using misguided lifting techniques like this, you need to take action not just to protect them from getting MSDs but to avoid being cited for failing to protect workers from “recognized hazards” under the General Duty Clause.

The Dangers of Improper Lifting: *What’s at Stake*

3 Reasons to Pay Attention

1. Sprains and strains to the back, shoulders and arms (aka “musculoskeletal disorders” or MSDs) hurt like crazy and often last a lifetime
2. More than half a million U.S. workers suffer MSDs each year
3. Scientific studies show that using improper techniques to lift heavy objects like the worker in the photo make you much more vulnerable to MSDs

The 7 MSD Risk Factors

For manual lifting, i.e., lifting and moving heavy or bulky objects without using a tool or machine like a forklift, pulley or crane, the MSD risk factors include:

1. The object’s weight



The heavier the object, the greater the energy needed to lift and move it and the higher the MSD risk

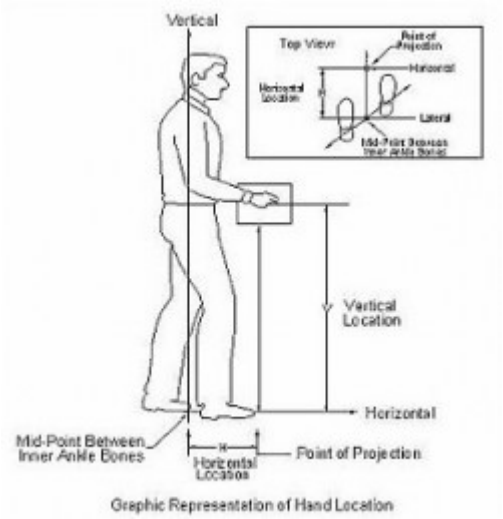
2. The object’s weight distribution and shape



Moving lighter objects might present a high risk of MSDs if the object’s shape

or bulkiness makes it hard to lift and carry

3. Horizontal distance of load from the body



The horizontal distance of the load away from the body means the distance from the low back to the hands when handling on object in front of the body

4. The object's vertical location



Vertical location means where the object is located in relation to the floor before, during and at the end of the lifting process

5. How long you handle the object



Lifting and moving objects involves a greater risk of MSDs when you do it over a frequent or sustained period

6. Your lifting posture



Bending the back and bending forward—like the worker in the photo above—puts major stress on your spine; bending your knees and using your legs to lift significantly reduces that stress

7. Your grip



In addition to increasing the risks of dropping the object, a poor grip reduces the amount of weight you can safely carry

10 Do’s & Don’ts for Safe Lifting

1. Stretch your muscles before lifting
2. Size up the load before you try lifting it to ensure you can handle it safely
3. Get as close as possible to the load before lifting it
4. Keep the load as close to your body as possible
5. Don’t lift objects that obscure your vision or footing
6. Don’t twist your back and waist when you lift
7. Don’t jerk the load
8. Organize the work so you can avoid lifting from floor to shoulder level or above
9. If possible, spread your lifting chores throughout the day rather than trying to complete them all at once
10. Use dollies, carts and other lifting tools whenever possible—rule of thumb: try not to carry loads more than 10 feet without getting mechanical help