Nobody’s immune to back pain

Back pain is a leading safety problem, second only to common colds as the reason people miss work.

Anyone who has to move heavy objects, work in awkward positions, hold one position for a long time or perform certain tasks at a fast pace can get hurt.

These tips will help protect your back while lifting:

- Don’t bend over the object you’re lifting. Bend your knees, squatting in front of the object to reach it.
- Lift slowly and carefully, using your leg and arm muscles to lift, not pulling with your back.
- Keep your back straight and your head up.
- Keep the object as close to your body as possible, gripping with the whole hand (there’s virtually no strength in fingertips).
- Keep abdominal muscles tight while making the lift, and avoid twisting. Turn the foot and point it in the direction of eventual movement.

Many work situations can put you in an awkward position which could distort the spine, put unbalanced pressure on discs and strain arm, leg or back tissues.

Here are suggestions for avoiding injury while working in awkward positions:

- Raise bins and containers off the floor and/or tilt them to reduce bending and over-reaching
- When working overhead, stand on a steady, adjustable platform. Keep back posture in its natural curve.
- In confined spaces, plan your work and reduce clutter that will further confine. Have adequate lighting
- Don’t hold an awkward position too long. Pause often to stretch and straighten.
- When leaning forward, support the weight of your upper body on your free hand and arm. This relieves pressure on your lower back.
- Position yourself as close as possible to the job, avoid over-reaching. When on ladders or scaffolding, use tools with longer handles.
- Place your work below the shoulder and above the knees.
- Push, rather than pull loads.

If an item is too heavy, bulky or high for one person, a team should move it. If

still too hazardous, then use conveyor belts, hand trucks, mechanical lifts, hoists or dollies.

Don’t store items to be handled on the floor. Whenever possible, keep them between your belt line and shoulders.

To reduce risk of lower back stress and strain, you can get training in lifting techniques, physical conditioning or stretching. Perhaps you can also redesign the job and save your back.