

TERMINOLOGY

Workers performing hazardous manual tasks have an increased risk of developing musculoskeletal disorders.

What are manual tasks at work?

The term *manual task* covers any activity that requires a person to use his or her physical body (musculoskeletal system) to perform work. This includes the use of force for lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying, moving, holding or restraining anything. It also includes work involving repetitive actions or sustained postures and concurrent exposure to vibration.

Manual task replaces the previously used term 'manual handling'.

What are hazardous manual tasks?

Almost all jobs include work that involves some form of manual task. To distinguish between those activities that are potentially a problem and

those that are not, the term *hazardous manual task* is used. Hazardous manual task refers to any manual task with characteristics that increase the risk of injury, such as:

- repetitive or sustained application of force;
- repetitive or sustained awkward postures;
- repetitive or sustained movements;
- application of high force, including jerky or unexpected forces;
- exposure to sustained vibration in combination with any of the above;
- handling of live people or animals; and
- handling of loads that are unstable, unbalanced or difficult to grasp or hold.

Almost half of all workplace injuries in Australia result from workers performing hazardous manual tasks.

What are musculoskeletal disorders?

Performing hazardous manual tasks at work can lead to a variety of injuries and conditions, collectively referred to as *musculoskeletal disorders*, including:

- sprains and strains of muscles, ligaments and tendons;
- back injuries, including damage to the muscles, tendons, ligaments, spinal discs, nerves, joints and bones;
- joint injuries or degeneration, including injuries to the shoulder, elbow, wrist, hip, knee, ankle, hands and feet;

- bone injuries;
- nerve injuries;
- muscular and vascular disorders as a result of hand-arm vibration; and
- soft tissue hernias.

A single event of exertion when performing a hazardous manual task can result in a musculoskeletal disorder. More commonly, however, such injuries are caused by cumulative 'wear and tear' on the musculoskeletal system.

Further information

In August 2007, the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (ASCC) declared the *National Standard for Manual Tasks* and the *National Code of Practice for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders from Performing Manual Tasks at Work*.

The code of practice provides practical guidance on how to manage risk arising from performing manual tasks at work. Both publications can be downloaded at www.ascc.gov.au

References

- AUSTRALIAN SAFETY AND COMPENSATION COUNCIL, 2007, *National Code of Practice for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders from Performing Manual Tasks at Work*: Australian Government, Canberra, 127 pp.
- AUSTRALIAN SAFETY AND COMPENSATION COUNCIL, 2007, *National Standard for Manual Tasks*: Australian Government, Canberra, 16 pp.