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Lifting Basics

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# Safety BULLETIN

## Lifting Basics

Despite the increased use of mechanical material handling equipment, many boxes, crates, bundles, and piles of materials still must be moved manually. This can lead to one of the most painful and costly workplace injuries that employees can suffer; a **BACK INJURY**. Whether material handling is a main job or just something that an employee needs to do occasionally, SAFETY is very important. According to the National Safety Council 400,000 workers suffer NEW back injuries each year. These injuries may occur wherever employees work, not just in the stockrooms and warehouses.

First and foremost, before any lifting procedure is attempted, make sure to “Size up” the job ahead. Determine if assistance is going to be needed or if a mechanical device will be useful. Remember to consider the weight, size, shape, and awkwardness of the load to be lifted. Use the most reliable means possible to move the load as safely as possible.

While strains, sprains, fractures, and bruises are the most common injuries that happen in the workplace, most of them are caused by unsafe work practices. No matter how knowledgeable or skilled employees are, the need is ever present for reminding them about ways to avoid injuries. Proper Lifting is a “learned” skill that needs to be practiced to keep the proper lifting methods fresh in mind.

It is a good probability that everyone has been told from time to time not to stoop over to lift! The “Lifter’s” leg muscles, not the backbone should do the work. Unfortunately, stooping over to lift is a habit that most workers develop early on. One way to break a habit is to form new ones. For example, if you stoop over to lift, retrain yourself to lift with your LEGS. Keep reminding yourself to do it this way until it becomes a new habit - - a good habit.

To lift a load above your shoulders, plan ahead! Think over your maneuvers before you begin to make your move. If you have no one to help with this type of lift, plan ahead to be able to rest the load about waist high so that you can change your grip and finish the lift.

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Finally, size up the job before you start the lift. If it is too big or awkward, don't be afraid to ask for help. After all, it is not just weight that makes a load a "two-person" job, it is also the size and shape of the load.

To make lifting easy and safe, follow these six rules:

1. **The feet**: Place one foot alongside the object to be lifted and the other behind it. This gives you stability and thrust.
2. **The back**: Keep your back straight and use the "sit-down" position. Remember that means the back itself is straight, not necessarily vertical.
3. **The chin**: Tuck in your chin so the neck and head continue the straight back line formed by your neck.
4. **The palms**: Extend your fingers and hands around the object you are going to lift.
5. **The arms and elbows**: Draw the load close to your body with your arms and elbows tucked into the sides of your body.
6. **The bodyweight**: Position yourself so the weight of your body is centered over your feet. This provides a more powerful line of thrust and good balance.

Another common mistake in the lifting process is getting your fingers caught between the load and the other surfaces. Lift the load a little so that one edge rests on the floor or table first, then let your hands slide up the sides so that when the full weight comes down, your fingers are not caught underneath. When passing through doorways or between machines, tuck your hands in or turn the load so that your fingers will not be trapped between the load and the other surface.