June 2024

# Health control plan resources

## Hazardous manual tasks

| What is a hazardous manual task? | Why is it a health hazard? | What are the exposure monitoring requirements? | What are the health monitoring requirements? |
|---|---|---|---|
| A manual task as defined in the work health and safety legislation requires a person to lower, lift, push, pull, move or restrain person, animal or thing. A hazardous manual task has the following characteristics:<br>• force either repetitive, sustained, high and sudden<br>• awkward or sustained postured<br>• repetitive movements<br>• vibration exposure<br>• duration of the task. | Some manual tasks can be hazardous as they may cause musculoskeletal disorders (MSD). A MSD means an injury to or a disease of the musculoskeletal system whether occurring suddenly or over a period of time[1]. MSDs may include conditions such as:<br>• sprains and strains of muscles, ligaments and tendons (for example, shoulder muscle strain leading to rotator cuff tear)<br>• back injuries, including damage to the muscles, tendons, ligaments, spinal discs (for example, ruptured discs), nerves (for example, sciatica), joints and bones | There are no general exposure monitoring requirements for hazardous manual tasks. However, exposure monitoring of factors contributing to hazardous manual tasks may be conducted (such as hand-arm vibration, or whole body vibration).<br>A hazardous manual task risk assessment should be undertaken to manage the risk and assist in identifying effective controls. | There is no specific health monitoring for this health hazard, however the discomfort survey as outlined in Appendix C of the Hazardous manual tasks code of practice is a positive way to promote worker input and monitor the tasks, which can increase the risk of a musculoskeletal disorder. |

[1] Safe Work Australia, Code of practice, hazardous manual tasks

| What is a hazardous manual task? | Why is it a health hazard? | What are the exposure monitoring requirements? | What are the health monitoring requirements? |
|---|---|---|---|
| | • joint injuries or degeneration, including injuries to the shoulder, elbow, wrist, hip, knee, ankle, hands and feet<br>• bone injuries (for example, fractures)<br>• nerve injuries (for example, carpal tunnel syndrome of the wrist)<br>• soft tissue hernias (for example, abdominal hernias)<br>• muscular and vascular disorders as a result of hand-arm vibration (HAV)[2]. | | |

## Controls for hazardous manual tasks.

Controls for the management of hazardous manual tasks and should eliminate risks rather than rely on workers to do the right thing. There is evidence that training in safe lifting techniques on its own is not an effective control for MSD. Manual task technique training is therefore on its own not an acceptable control measure.

A duty holder should identify the hazardous manual tasks that contribute to musculoskeletal disorders (MSD). As outlined in the Work health and Safety legislation when a duty holder is determining control measures it must consider all relevant risks which contribute to an MSD including awkward postures, movements, forces, the duration and frequency of the task, workplace environmental conditions that may affect the task including design of the work area, layout of the workplace, systems used, and the nature, size and weight involved in carrying out the hazardous manual task.

Consider engineering or design control to reduce the risk of MSDs. The control should deal with contributing factors causing the risk. For example, if the design of access to a vehicle is causing the risk of awkward posture or slips, trips and falls, then designing suitable access is the recommended control.

## Controls for hazardous manual tasks.

You need to ensure that the control measure reduces or eliminates the risk factor, e.g. awkward posture. It is useful to focus on efficiency as well as risk reduction, as safer ways of doing work are often also more efficient.

When implementing risk controls the following principles should be applied:

- the hierarchy of control
- trialling solutions before making them permanent
- reviewing controls after an initial testing period as they may need modification
- developing work procedures to ensure that the controls are understood and responsibilities are clear
- communicating the reasons for the change to workers and others
- training workers to use the controls
- supervising the implementation of controls.

Safe Work NSW has produced a number of tools and resources for managing risks associated with musculoskeletal disorders and hazardous manual tasks.