



BUREAU OF WORKERS' COMPENSATION  
*PA Training for Health & Safety (PATHS)*

## **Safe Lifting & Material Handling**

Handling material is a daily function in many workplaces. All too often, this task is taken for granted with little knowledge or attention given to the consequences if it is done incorrectly. All employees need to look at and evaluate how materials are handled inside and outside of their workplace. Whether the operation involves delivering or receiving material, an area should be designated for that purpose.

How the materials are loaded or unloaded is a key factor in reducing employee injuries. Persons involved in material handling should be able to lift and hold the weight of the material used in their operations. They must also be properly trained in the correct way to lift and carry the items. Remember, no matter how small or lightweight an item is, an injury can still occur if you move it incorrectly. Lifting, carrying or moving materials safely will decrease your chances of getting injured.

Keep in mind there are many times it is not necessary for an individual to lift and carry material manually. Various types of equipment - dolly, cart, forklift - are available to move material safely. Depending upon the type of operation, using a dolly or cart to move material can result in minimal disruption of work flow and can also prevent injuries. However, only trained operators should use a powered pallet jack/lift truck or forklift.

Pallet jacks can be used to carry heavier loads from one area to another. It is imperative that materials are placed on the jack in a safe and secure manner to avoid having the load shift, fall off, roll over or impair the operator's vision. You should only operate a pallet jack, lift truck or forklift if you have received the necessary training in safe operation and control.

Remembering the tips given in the attachment, as well as other information you may have been provided with in the past, will allow you to handle materials safely and avoid injuries.



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### Tips for safe lifting:

**Plan** before you lift. Remove anything that is in the way. Pushing is easier than pulling. Pulling is easier than carrying. Lowering loads causes less strain than lifting.

**Get help for heavy or bulky loads.** Use equipment like a cart to help when possible.

**Warm up your muscles with gentle stretches** before you lift. This is very important if you have been sitting for more than 15 minutes before lifting.

**Test the weight of the load first.** Be sure that you can handle it safely. A big load of the same weight will put more strain on your body than a small load. Break your load into smaller or lighter loads.

**Face the way you need to move.** Avoid twisting or side bending. Turn your entire body. Place your feet wide apart to keep your balance.

**Hold the load close to your body.** Grip the load using your whole hand not just the fingers. Using your whole hand will give you the greatest grip area and strength. Balance your load evenly between both arms.

**Lift with as straight a back as is comfortable.** Tighten your abdominal (stomach) muscles. Bend your legs so they do the lifting.

**Keep the load between shoulder and knee height.** Avoid reaching.

**Change your position and stretch to relax and rest your tired muscles.** You need time to recover your strength between lifts to be able to work safely. Repeated and long lifts are the most tiring. Switch between heavy loads and lighter ones.

**Plan where to set the load down.** Place loads on raised platform. Leave enough room for your hands to grip the load. Avoid placing loads directly on the floor.

**Rest more often** when it is hot and humid.

**Take more time to warm up** your muscles when it is cold.

**Take more breaks** if you are also using tools or equipment that vibrates.

- Face the way you need to move.
- Lift with your back as straight as is comfortable
- Hold the load close to your body.



### How much can I lift safely?

There is no single safe weight for lifting. The answer depends on many factors

- Height, weight, and age of worker
- Fitness level, health problems and previous injuries
- Size and shape of the load
- Grip on the load
- Distance between you and the load
- Distance and the direction that you lift the load
- How often and how much time you spend lifting
- How often and how long are your breaks
- Floor surface

<p>How can the person in this picture lift the load more safely?</p>	<p>Keep the back as straight as is comfortable. Hold the load close to the body.</p>