

Mechanical lifting devices By Joe Hammond



Prior to the session, observe associates whose work can be eased by using mechanical equipment for lifting objects, and thus, lessen the potential for muscular sprains and strains.

It is only natural to simply pick up and move items. In doing so, we expose ourselves to the major cause of injury in the workplace. The goal of this discussion is to urge people to consider the use of mechanical equipment for lifting, no matter how basic.

The only safe lift is no lift!

Ask the group what that statement means. If you consider using means other than brute strength when moving material, products or even people in the case of health care, you can save yourself a great deal of pain and effort, and be more productive. The challenge is to lessen the stress on your back, by transferring that stress to equipment that lifts for you.

Explain to the group what is meant by mechanical lifting devices. They are any piece of equipment that helps transfer material from one point to another.

Ask the group to identify all the types of mechanical material moving devices they can think of.

Answers include:

- Hoists;
- Conveyors;
- Fork trucks;
- Pallet jacks;
- Two- or four-wheel carts, and even pry bars.

You may wish to have some within view that are used in your facility.

Ask the group what the benefit is in using such equipment. Possible answers include safety, ease, speed and ability to move a greater quantity.

Then, ask the group to provide examples of mechanical lifting devices in use at your facility. In addition, ask the group what might improve the material handling functions.

In working with mechanical handling devices, remember the five A's for ensuring their use.

- Affordable: You won't purchase the equipment if it cannot meet a cost/benefit ratio. However, saving the cost of one back injury will usually pay for a great deal of equipment.
- Available: Obtain sufficient quantities of the equipment so they are in the work area where they are needed.
- Accessible: If a great deal of travel is necessary to reach the devices, employees may not use them.
- Advantageous: The user needs to be convinced that using these tools makes sense and is a benefit to his or her job.
- Appropriate: A forklift may not be necessary for a box of marshmallows.

The message is to encourage everyone to see the value in using equipment to make their work easier, simpler and safer. Remember, "Don't work hard, work smart!"

Group activity

Have the group review their work sites and identify ideas for eliminating or controlling sprain and strain exposures by using mechanical lifting devices. Ask the associates to suggest these improvements to their supervisors.

References

Web sites

- What is manual materials handling? (Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation): www.ohiobwc.com/downloads/blankpdf/MaterialsHandling.pdf
- Ergonomics eTool, Materials Handling (Occupational Safety and Health Administration): www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/electricalcontractors/materials/index.html

Videos

BWC's Division of Safety & Hygiene video library has videos on material handling and lifting safety. These are available for loan to Ohio employers. Order a catalog by calling 1-800-OHIOBWC (ask for the video library), or visit our web site, ohiobwc.com.

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