



Reduce your risk of back injury — let your equipment do the work

Oh, my aching back . . .

From 1991–1995, 22 percent of injuries in construction were back injuries.

Reaching, lifting, and carrying are hard on your back, arms, and legs. The weight and distance you carry the load determine how hard your muscles have to work. Unloading materials a long distance from where they are needed increases the risk of injury because of the long carrying distance. In addition to the hazards that can be caused by the weights and distances, there are other site-specific hazards that can also contribute to back injury:

- *Obstacles that can cause slips or trips.* Serious back injuries can result when your body tries to recover from a slip or trip while maintaining the load you're carrying. Cluttered, unkempt worksites increase the risk of slips and trips.
- *Cluttered areas that make the use of carts and dollies impractical.* As well, stronger push force is needed to move carts over surfaces covered with debris.
- *Materials stored on the floor.* Additional work is created for your muscles each time you bend or crouch to floor level to reach and lift materials. Materials stored flat, as opposed to on end, require further bending to lift.
- *Materials stored in poor locations.* Your body is placed in awkward positions to reach around, above, or below obstacles. Ordering and delivery of too much material at a given time can create unnecessary stacks of stored material. Storing materials also means double handling, once to bring materials to storage and a second time to carry them to the work location.
- *Work done at floor level.* Additional stress on your back and legs is caused by doing prefabrication work at floor level.

Tips for reducing the hazards

Housekeeping:

- Keep floors and passageways free of obstacles. Remove slip and trip hazards; this allows the use of carts and dollies to move heavy materials.
- Promote the use of carts and dollies. Contractors should make this type of equipment available and accessible.
- The contractor or foreman should perform a site inspection daily and post a list of housekeeping deficiencies. This makes everyone responsible for maintaining a clean and safe work area.

Planning:

- Plan for materials to be delivered when you need them, minimizing the excess stored materials. This in turn eliminates the need to manoeuvre and work around stored materials.
- Deliver materials as close to the job as possible. This minimizes the distances that materials are carried and the number of times they are handled.

Raise the work off the floor:

- Set up platforms so that prefabrication work is raised off the floor to a level that is safe and comfortable.