

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR MANUAL HANDLING OPERATIONS

1. Introduction

It is the policy of the University to protect all staff and to provide a healthy and safe working environment to them.

Manual handling operations have to meet the legal requirements stipulated in Part VII of the Occupational Safety and Health Regulation (OSHR).

This code of practice is to provide Departments the information and recommended practices on the manual handling operations regulations and its requirements.

For the purpose of this code of practice, 'Responsible Person' is the Heads of Department (HoD) and 'Competent Person(s)' is/are the departmental staff appointed by the HoD to conduct preliminary and further assessments of all manual handling operations in the department.

2. Recommended Practices in the University

Heads of Department must ensure that the legal requirements of the OSHR concerning manual handling operations are to be met.

To assist Heads of Department in conducting risk assessments on manual handling operations at the departmental levels, staff may be appointed as 'Competent Persons'. There is no strict limit on the number of 'Competent Person' appointed and Heads have the discretion to make such appointment.

However, it is to the benefit of the department and in line with the spirit of the Regulations and the University's health and safety policy that the staff appointed as 'Competent Persons' should have management responsibilities and have received appropriate training in manual handling operations.

To enable Competent Persons to conduct assessments on manual handling operations, Heads of Department should nominate staff in their departments to attend suitable training courses on the subject. HSEO can assist in identifying such courses or organizing the course when necessary.

The Competent Persons should maintain written records on the preliminary and further assessments they performed in their departments.

For such operations which are identified to be manual handling in nature, the Competent Persons must report to their Heads of Department and advise on the appropriate methods to protect staff from injuries.

Preliminary and further assessment forms can be downloaded from HSEO homepage (HSE Form 10 & HSE Form 11).

3. Loads

There is no numerical definition for 'load' since whether a load can be safely handled is affected by: the absolute mass of the load, the dimension of the load/packaging, the physical environment in which the load is to be handled, the centre of gravity of the load, and the physical ability and medical state of the staff concerned.

The competent person should provide the staff with relevant information as to the weight of the load. The following means may be considered:

1. To use the printed weight on the package of the load if the package is original.
2. To use weighting scale to obtain the weight of the load.
3. To trial-lift one end/corner of the package of the load to estimate the possibility of lifting the load by one person.

It should be noted that there is no requirement for department to acquire scales or other weighting equipment in order to estimate the weight of the load nor is there a rigid requirement to obtain its accurate weight for obvious reasons. A competent person should be able to use any of the above-mentioned methods to estimate the weight of the load and inform the staff.

4. Safety Requirements for Manual Handling Operations

The followings are to explain the legal requirements in OSHR concerning manual handling operations. It allows easy interpretation of the legal jargons and the practices in the University.

'Manual handling operation (MHO)' is defined as 'moving or supporting a load (including lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling and carrying the load) by a person's hand or arms or by some other form of bodily effort'.

4.1 Preliminary Assessment of Operations

For operations that are manual handling operations, competent persons have the following responsibilities:

- (a) to make preliminary assessment of risks concerning manual handling operations, including both existing and new operations; and
- (b) to repeat the preliminary assessment if there is a significant change in the work condition or environment of the manual handling operation.

4.2 Protection of Employees

If, after preliminary assessment, the manual handling operation is found to have a high risk to the staff, then the competent person should inform the Head of Department and the supervisors should not ask their staff to perform the operation alone.

Additional staff working in team or mechanical aids should be used to handle the operation.

It is important that employees should not undertake any manual handling operations that may create safety and health risks.

4.3 Further Assessment of Operations

For operations identified to be of high manual handling risks to the staff, the competent person must:

- (a) make further assessment to assess the health and safety risks of staff using prescribed format published by the authority; and
- (b) to repeat the assessment if there is a significant change in the work condition or environment of the manual handling operation.

The further assessment form include questions covering extensive areas and conditions of work and the ability of the staff and therefore should be completed by trained staff (e.g. Competent persons) who are familiar with the operations.

4.4 Reduction of Risks and Provision of Protective Measures

For those operations identified to have high manual handling risks, the competent person must make arrangement for preventive and protection measures such as:

- (a) to take appropriate steps to reduce risks to the lowest level that is reasonably practicable;
- (b) to inform the staff on the weight of the load and the heaviest side of each load whose centre of gravity is not centrally positioned;
- (c) to provide staff with such mechanical aids and protective equipment (e.g. forklift truck, trolley, gloves and lifting belts) as will secure their safety and health while undertaking the manual handling operation;

-
- (d) to assign a team of staff to perform lifting of the load; and
 - (e) to use other methods that may reduce manual handling risks.

The competent person must also ensure effective planning, organization, control, monitoring and review of those preventive and protective measures.

Apart from providing staff with mechanical aids and other arrangement, the competent persons should take note of the work environment to see if there is any restriction of working space that may cause health and safety concerns, and to adopt whatever desirable measures to enable reduction of the risks.

4.5 Appointment of Assistants/Competent Persons

If 10 or more employees are normally employed at any one time to perform manual handling operations which are identified to have safety and health risks, the responsible person (Head of Department) must appoint more competent persons to assist in carrying out the preventive and protective measures.

The number of competent persons must have regard to:

- (a) the number of staff to undertake manual handling operations;
- (b) the size of the workplace;
- (c) the risks of the staff are exposed to; and
- (d) distribution of risks within the workplace.

If more than one competent person is appointed, the responsible person must:

- (a) make arrangement to secure co-operation among the competent persons;
- (b) allow adequate time for competent persons to perform their duties; and
- (c) provide adequate resources for competent persons to perform their duties.

A competent person is one that has undergone appropriate training, and possesses experience and other characteristics necessary to fulfill his appointment.

4.6 Provision of Information to Employees

Competent person must ensure that staff who undertake manual handling operations identified with high safety and health risks are provided with relevant comprehensible information as to:

- (a) the safety and health risks of the operation, and
- (b) the preventive and protective measures for such manual handling operations.

The types of information should include: the weight of the load, whether mechanical aids are available to assist in the work, the correct ways to lift the load, and the constraint in the environment, such as inadequate work space or slippery floor, that may affect the staff's health and safety.

4.7 Allocating Tasks to Employees

When allocating work tasks relating to high-risk manual handling operations, the competent person must assess the respective capabilities of the employees to perform those tasks.

Before he is satisfied that the employees are capable to handle the operation without health and safety risks to themselves, the competent person must not require them to undertake the operation.

For example, if the health and strength of the staff are questionable, such as those known to suffer from illness or pregnancies or are physically disadvantaged, competent person must not assign the manual handling operation to those staff.

Other factors to be considered during assessment include staff's ability, environmental constraint, mechanical aids, etc.

4.8 Adequate Training

Employer must provide necessary training for avoiding or minimizing manual handling risks to employees before they undertake high-risk manual handling operations.

New appointees or employees posted to new or changed risks to their safety and health as a result of new work tasks, replacement of plant or machinery, new system of work, new and modified technology, etc. must also be provided with health and safety training by the employers.

An employer must ensure that the training is:

- (a) repeated whenever necessary;
- (b) modified to take into account new or changed risks to the safety and health of the employees; and
- (c) provided during the employees' ordinary working hours.

The training may be in the form of health and safety instructions on manual handling provided by the competent persons or regular training courses offered by training institutions. Heads of Department should nominate their staff to attend such training courses and competent persons must ensure that all records are maintained on training courses and instructions for the employees.

4.9 Duties of Employees

An employee must:

- (a) use any mechanical aid or protective equipment, and conform to any system of work and any work practices at the employee's workplace, that the employee's employer has provided or established in order to comply with the requirements, and
- (b) take reasonably care for the safety and health of other persons who may be affected by the employee's acts or omissions when undertaking those manual handling operations.

Staff must cooperate with their competent persons or supervisors on manual handling operation, in using the mechanical aids and protective equipment so provided for the operation.

In cases where the operation may affect nearby person, it is advisable to have sufficient staff station on site to secure the vicinity of the operations from other person.