

NATIONAL STANDARD FOR MANUAL TASKS



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Australian Government
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Foreword

The Australian Safety and Compensation Council (ASCC) leads and coordinates national efforts to prevent workplace deaths, injury and disease in Australia.

Through the quality and relevance of the information it provides, ASCC seeks to influence the awareness and activities of every person and organisation with a role in improving Australia's occupational health and safety (OHS) performance.

More specifically, ASCC aims to:

- > support and enhance the efforts of the Australian, state and territory governments to improve the prevention of workplace deaths, injury and disease
- > work in alliance with others to facilitate the development and implementation of better preventative approaches, and
- > ensure the needs of small business are integrated into these approaches.

The *National OHS Strategy 2002-2012*, released by the Workplace Relations Ministers' Council on 24 May 2002, records a commitment by all Australian, state and territory governments, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australian Council of Trade Unions, to share the responsibility of ensuring that Australia's performance in work-related health and safety is continuously improved.

The *National OHS Strategy* sets out five national priorities to achieve short-term and long-term improvements.

The priorities are to:

- > reduce high incidence and high severity risks
- > improve the capacity of business operators and workers to manage OHS effectively
- > prevent occupational disease more effectively
- > eliminate hazards at the design stage, and
- > strengthen the capacity of government to influence OHS outcomes.

In line with these priorities, national standards are declared by ASCC under section 6 of the *Australian Workplace Safety Standards Act 2005* (Commonwealth), and prescribe preventative action to avert occupational deaths, injuries, and diseases. Most national standards deal with the elimination, reduction, or management of specific workplace hazards.

The expectation of the Australian Government and ASCC is that national standards will be suitable for adoption by the Australian, state, and territory governments. Such action will increase uniformity in the regulation of occupational health and safety throughout Australia and contribute to the enhanced efficiency of the Australian economy.

In common with other ASCC documents, these national standards are advisory instruments only, unless they are made mandatory by a law other than the National Occupational Health and Safety Commission Act or by an award or instrument made under such a law. The application of a national code of practice in any particular State or Territory is the prerogative of that State or Territory.



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Preface

'Manual tasks' is physical work activity. In this national standard it is defined as any activity requiring a person to use any part of their musculoskeletal system in performing their work.

Manual tasks can therefore include:

- > lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying or otherwise moving, holding or restraining any person, animal or item
- > repetitive actions
- > sustained work postures, and
- > exposure to vibration.

Performing some manual tasks can be hazardous, potentially causing musculoskeletal disorders which can lead to death, injury or disease. Between July 1997 and June 2003, manual tasks at work resulted in 437,852 compensation claims in Australia, or 41.6 % of all compensation claims for that period, with a direct cost not counting indirect impacts (including long-term impacts on the quality of life of the injured worker) of \$11.965 billion.

In 1990 *National Standard for Manual Handling* [NOHSC: 1001(1990)] was published. Guidance on how to meet the requirements of this national standard has been provided by the *National Code of Practice for Manual Handling* [NOHSC: 2005(1990)], the *National Code of Practice for the Prevention of Occupational Overuse Syndrome* [NOHSC: 2013(1994)] and other relevant NOHSC guidance notes.

This *National Standard for Manual Tasks* sets out the principles for the effective management of hazardous manual tasks to avert musculoskeletal disorders arising from manual tasks in the workplace. It was released in a draft form for public comment, in line with a decision by the ASCC on 1 March 2005.

This *National Standard for Manual Tasks* was declared by the ASCC, in accordance with section 6 of the *Australian Workplace Safety Standards Act 2005* (Cth), on 22 August 2007. It replaces the *National Standard for Manual Handling* [NOHSC: 1001(1990)].

Compliance with the recommendations in this standard may not necessarily mean that a person has fulfilled their obligations under all relevant occupational health and safety acts and regulations. Persons should contact their state/territory or Australian Government health and safety authority for information on their obligations.

Implementation of this National Standard will require coordinated action on the part of all parties involved including effective reporting and monitoring of preventative actions to avert musculoskeletal disorders as well as injuries. Such information will assist in effectively evaluating the effectiveness of the National Standard and its contribution to improving safety.



1. Preliminary

Name of Standard

1.1 This Standard is the National Standard for Manual Tasks.

Scope and Application

1.2 The scope of this Standard is manual tasks in the workplace.

1.3 This Standard applies to:

- a. persons who design, manufacture or supply items or workplaces;
- b. employers or persons with control of workplaces;
- c. employers or persons with control of work; and
- d. workers or employees.

1.4 An obligation to comply with a provision in this Standard is an obligation to **comply as far as 'reasonably practicable' or equivalent concept**, as defined in this standard.

Objective and Principles

1.5 The objective of this National Standard is to reduce the incidence and severity of musculoskeletal disorders to workers performing manual tasks.

Definitions

1.6 In this Standard, unless the contrary intention appears:

hazard means any thing (including an intrinsic property of a thing), or situation, with the potential to cause or contribute to the development of musculoskeletal disorders to workers performing manual tasks. It may include the type of work performed, the way the work is performed, including use or handling of items, or a combination of these factors.

health and safety representative includes a person elected to represent a group of workers on health and safety issues.

item subject to the scope of duties for designers, manufacturers and suppliers as outlined in part 2, includes the following:

- a. plant;
- b. substance;
- c. building or structure used as a place of work.



Note: An item may also be described in some jurisdictions as materials, packaging, containers, fixtures, fittings, tools, implements, instruments, machinery or electronic equipment. The above definition may include such items where they are relevant in managing the risks posed by a hazardous manual task as defined in this Standard.

manual task means a task comprised wholly or partly by any activity requiring a person to use his or her musculoskeletal system in performing his or her work and can include the use of force for lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying or otherwise moving, holding or restraining any person, animal or item.

hazardous manual task means

- a. a manual task having any of the following characteristics:
 - i. repetitive or sustained application of force;
 - ii. repetitive or sustained awkward posture;
 - iii. repetitive or sustained movement;
 - iv. application of high force;
 - v. exposure to sustained vibration;
- b. a manual task involving the handling of a person or an animal; or
- c. a manual task involving the handling of unstable or unbalanced loads or loads which are difficult to grasp or hold.

musculoskeletal disorder means an injury or disease of the musculoskeletal system that arises in whole or in part from undertaking manual tasks in the workplace, whether occurring suddenly or over a prolonged period of time, but does not include an injury or disease which is caused by crushing, entrapment or cutting resulting from the mechanical operation of plant or other equipment.

person includes companies and corporate entities such as a body corporate, unincorporated body or association and a partnership.

person who designs means a person who has control over the design, re-design or alteration of an item.

person who manufactures means a person who has control over the making or construction of an item.

person who supplies means a person who has control over the supply, importation, or re-supply of an item.



person with control means:

- a. a person with control of the work such as an employer; or
- b. a person with control of the workplace, such as an owner of a workplace; or
- c. principal contractors, a self-employed person or persons, a person who conducts a business or an undertaking, or a person who has management or control of a business or workplace; **and does not include**
- d. workers, employees and supervisors.

Note: 'person with control' of work or a workplace are expressed and applied in differing manners across jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction may adopt their own expression when implementing this Standard.

reasonably practicable means what can be done and which is reasonable in the circumstances taking account of:

- a. the probability (likelihood) of the hazard or risk occurring;
- b. the degree of harm arising from the hazard or risk;
- c. the state of knowledge about the hazard or risk and ways it may be removed or mitigated;
- d. the availability and suitability of ways to remove or mitigate the hazard or risk; and
- e. the cost of removing or mitigating the hazard or risk.

Note: 'reasonably practicable' is expressed and applied in differing manners across jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction may adopt their own expression when implementing this Standard.

risk means the likelihood of a manual task causing musculoskeletal disorders to workers and the likely severity of those musculoskeletal disorders should they occur.

risk control means a method to manage the risks posed by a hazard by eliminating the risks or, if this is not reasonably practicable, minimising the risks of musculoskeletal disorders so far as is reasonably practicable.

system of work includes any of the following:

- a. work processes;
- b. work practices; and
- c. work methods.

use means the act of handling or interacting with any item, system of work or workplace in the course of performing a manual task.



Note: The use of an item or workplace or system of work includes its transport; storage; assembly, erection or installation; commission; operation or use; maintenance; cleaning; testing or inspection; any relevant emergency procedure; decommission; disassembly, dismantling or removal; and safe disposal of the item, workplace, or system of work.

Note: 'use' is expressed and applied in differing manners across jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction may adopt their own expression when implementing this Standard.

work means any activity (physical or mental) carried out in the conduct of a business, an organisation, a trade or a profession, regardless of whether or not:

- a. remuneration is offered for the activity; or
- b. the business is conducted for profit.

worker means an employee or a person who is undertaking work under a contract of employment, an apprenticeship, a traineeship, or other contract of service which may include work experience placements.

workplace means any place where a worker carries out work.

Note: A workplace is not limited to a building or structure.



2. General Provisions

Duty Holders

- 2.1 The duty-holders under this standard are:
- persons who design plant, and buildings or structures used as a place of work;
 - persons who manufacture plant and substances;
 - persons who supply plant and substances; and
 - persons with control.

Note: The Standard applies to workers but does not consider them to be primary duty holders. The specific duties that apply to workers are detailed in Section 5.

- 2.2 A person may have duties associated with more than one of the roles mentioned in Section 2.1.
- 2.3 If two or more persons have the same duty then each person retains responsibility for that duty and must undertake that duty to the extent that they have control or make management decisions over the matter to which the duty relates.
- 2.4 The duty applies to the extent to which the person has control or makes management decisions over the matter to which the duty relates.



3. Duties of persons who design, manufacture and supply

Duty to manage risks of musculoskeletal disorders

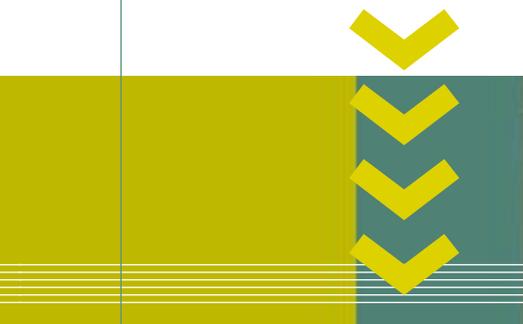
- 3.1 Persons who design, manufacture or supply must, as far as reasonably practicable, eliminate the risks or, if this is not reasonably practicable, minimise the risks of musculoskeletal disorders to workers performing manual tasks that may arise from either:
 - a. the nature of the item designed; or
 - b. the nature of the item manufactured or supplied by the person; or
 - c. the manner in which it is supplied.
- 3.2 Persons who supply will be deemed to have met this duty with respect to the nature of the item supplied when either persons who design or persons who manufacture have already fulfilled this duty with respect to the item supplied.
- 3.3 Persons who design an item, or manufacture or supply an item for use during manual tasks must, as far as reasonably practicable, ascertain and take account of in the design, manufacture or supply:
 - a. the intended use(s) of the item;
 - b. potential hazards that may give rise to musculoskeletal disorders to workers performing manual tasks; and
 - c. options for the elimination of risks or control of potential risks posed by the hazards.
- 3.4 The duty applies to the extent to which:
 - a. a person has control or makes management decisions over the design, manufacture or supply; and
 - b. the item is used as intended during manual tasks.

Note: Obligations are also placed on persons who design, manufacture, and supply by the National Standard for Plant [NOHSC:1010 (1994)].



Communication of safety information

- 3.5 Persons who design, manufacture, or supply an item for use during manual tasks must provide information on the risks assessed and control measures required to enable the item or workplace to be manufactured, supplied, and used safely.
- 3.6 This information must include:
- a. the intended use(s) of the item; and
 - b. options for the elimination of risks, or if this is not reasonably practicable, the minimisation of risks of musculoskeletal disorders to workers performing manual tasks that have not been eliminated by persons who design, manufacture and/or supply at the time of design, manufacture, or supply.
- 3.7 This information must adequately address the residual risks to allow the item to be used as intended in a safe manner.
- 3.8 This information must be updated whenever new information on manual tasks or aspects of the item relevant to their use during manual tasks becomes readily available.
- 3.9 This updated information must be provided with all items subsequently supplied.
- 3.10 The information must be readily understood by persons in control and workers who will use the item during a manual task.
- 3.11 This information must be retained for a minimum period of 7 years unless:
- a. it is reasonably foreseeable that the item may be used as intended for a longer period; or
 - b. other applicable laws specify a different period of time.



4. Duties of persons with control

General duty of person with control

- 4.1 A person with control must, as far as reasonably practicable:
- identify hazardous manual tasks that may give rise to musculoskeletal disorders in workers handling a person or an animal, or using an item, a system of work, or a workplace;
 - assess the risks posed by hazardous manual tasks; and
 - eliminate the risks.

If this is not reasonably practicable, a person with control must minimise the risks of musculoskeletal disorders that may arise from hazardous manual tasks so far as is reasonably practicable.

- 4.2 A person with control has a duty to the extent to which the person can exercise control over or make management decisions about the work or workplace.

Risk management

- 4.3 A person with control must undertake a risk management process as set out in Part 6.
- 4.4 A person with control must undertake a risk management process:
- before work involving a manual task commences;
 - when a musculoskeletal disorder or a hazardous manual task is reported;
 - when any change, redesign or alteration to structures, the workplace, items or systems of work used in performing manual tasks is proposed that may alter the risks of musculoskeletal disorders; and
 - when new information on performing manual tasks relating to structures, the workplace, items or systems of work in use becomes available to a person with control.

Consultation

- 4.5 A person with control must consult workers who undertake manual tasks, health and safety representatives, and, as far as reasonably practicable, other duty holders identified in this Standard about matters affecting health and safety related to manual tasks including:
- the provision of information and training, and the identification of hazardous manual tasks, risk assessment, risk control and monitoring of manual tasks; and
 - any proposed changes, redesign or alteration to structures, the workplace, items or systems of work used during manual tasks that may alter the risks of musculoskeletal disorders.



- 4.6 A person with control must ensure that consultation is undertaken before:
- changes are made to the design of a workplace, a system of work, or item used during manual tasks that may alter the risks of musculoskeletal disorders;
 - new items or systems of work are introduced, or manual tasks are performed at a new workplace; and
 - conducting any step of the risk management process outlined in Part 6.

Provision of information, training and supervision

- 4.7 A person with control of work must provide workers with appropriate information, training and supervision to enable them to:
- perform manual tasks safely; and
 - participate in the risk management process.
- 4.8 A person with control must provide task-specific information and training on:
- safe methods for performing manual tasks;
 - the safe use of systems of work; and
 - new information affecting manual tasks related to items, systems of work, and workplaces as it becomes available.
- 4.9 A person with control must provide training prior to manual tasks being undertaken, on an ongoing basis, and when any aspect of the work changes.
- 4.10 A person with control must provide all of the above information in a way that takes account of the communication needs of workers.
- 4.11 A person with control must provide supervision of manual tasks to ensure that the hazardous manual tasks are carried out safely and according to the task-specific training provided.
- 4.12 The information, training, and supervision must be adequate to allow the workers to carry out the manual task in a safe manner.



5. Duties of workers

Workers' duty to take care

- 5.1 Workers who perform manual tasks must, as far as they are able and with respect to manual tasks:
- a. take reasonable care of their own health and safety and the health and safety of others in the workplace;
 - b. co-operate with all persons with control in complying with this standard;
 - c. comply with all lawful instructions, information and training provided in relation to health and safety by persons with control;
 - d. comply with risk control measures as instructed and trained; and
 - e. notify persons with control about any matter known to them that affects or might affect the ability of the persons with control to comply with this Standard.



6. Risk Management Process

Steps – Risk management process for manual tasks

6.1 In order to manage risks arising from manual tasks, persons with control must, as far as reasonably practicable:

Step 1: Identify hazardous manual tasks that have given or may give rise to musculoskeletal disorders to workers handling a person or an animal, or using an item, a system of work, or a workplace during a manual task.

Step 2: Assess the risks posed by hazardous manual tasks.

The risk assessment must take account of the following direct risk factors:

- i. the posture of the worker;
- ii. the forces exerted by the worker and on the worker by the item person or animal;
- iii. speed of movements by the worker;
- iv. exposure of the worker to vibration; and
- v. the duration and frequency of the task.



Step 3: Eliminate the risks or, if this is not reasonably practicable, minimise the risks of musculoskeletal disorders arising from hazardous manual tasks so far as is reasonably practicable by implementing risk control measures.

- a. The method used to minimise the risks must take account of the interaction or potential interaction between the direct risk factors and the following factors that contribute to risk or a source of risk:
 - i. the layout of the workplace;
 - ii. the work environment;
 - iii. the characteristics and locations of any relevant item; and
 - iv. work organisation and the system of work.
- b. One or a combination of the methods listed below must be used to eliminate the risks or, if this is not reasonably practicable, to minimise the risks so far as is reasonably practicable by:
 - i. altering the workplace where the manual tasks are being carried out;
 - ii. altering environmental conditions, including heat and cold, and vibration where the manual tasks are being carried out;
 - iii. altering the work organisation and system of work used to carry out the manual tasks;
 - iv. modifying items used in manual tasks or substituting other items;
 - v. using aids designed to assist in carrying out manual tasks; or
 - vi. providing information, training, instruction, and supervision in a task-specific method for performing a manual task, personal protective equipment, or the combination of these.
- c. The methods used in vi. should be used as the sole or primary means of controlling the risk only where it can be demonstrated that it is not reasonably practicable to achieve risk control by the use of i. to v. above.

Step 4: Monitor and review risk control measures on an ongoing basis to ensure they:

- a. have been implemented;
- b. continue to work to eliminate or minimise the risks of musculoskeletal disorders so far as is reasonably practicable; and
- c. do not result in new hazardous manual tasks.



7. Schedule of Approved Codes of Practice

- 7.1 The following schedule of codes may be amended, supplemented or deleted from time-to-time by the Australian Safety and Compensation Council:
- a. National Code of Practice for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders from Performing Manual Tasks at Work