



Manual handling hazards - liquor retail industry

Workers in the liquor retail industry are at most risk of suffering manual handling injuries such as strains and sprains from lifting and carrying loads.

A WorkSafe inspection program carried out at 64 liquor retailers identified manual handling as the most common hazard in the workplace. Employees were at most risk of a manual handling injury when moving and processing stock such as cartons of liquor.

Manual handling means any activity requiring the use of force exerted by a person to lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain a person, animal or thing.

Across all industries, manual handling injuries account for approximately one third of the total Lost Time Injuries/Diseases (LTI/Ds). Within the liquor retail industry the proportion is higher with manual handling accounting for half of the total LTI/Ds.

An analysis of the industry's injury data showed sales assistants in the 25–34 year age category sustain the highest number of injuries. Most of the injuries occur when lifting/handling loads and most commonly result in sprains and strains.

Recurring manual handling hazards

Hazard 1

Many liquor retailers require employees to carry out manual handling tasks above shoulder height, both on the shop floor and in the cool room where cartons of liquor are displayed or stored.

To reach stock above shoulder height, the back is arched and the arms act as long levers, making the load difficult to control and significantly increasing the risk of injury.

Hazard 2

Employees are often asked to carry out manual handling tasks, which force them to bend and twist the spine significantly when lifting cartons on to or off a racking system.

Without the use of an appropriate working platform, employees' movements are restricted, compelling the employee to adopt extreme postures and placing them at a greater risk of injury to the back.

Hazard 3

Identified as a significant concern were tasks that involve repetitive movements and maintaining static postures. This can occur through the repetitive scanning of bottles and cartons.

Both repetitive movements and maintaining static postures can lead to occupational overuse syndrome.

WorkSafe recommendations

Store heavier and frequently used items on shelves that are between knee and chest height.

Provide alternative ways to place and retrieve items in storage areas such as using a suitable working platform to prevent employees having to lift above shoulder height or adopting a poor posture.

Stock levels need to be managed to ensure there is adequate space to access around displays and store areas.

Whenever possible, repetitive tasks should be combined with non-repetitive tasks. Alternatively, frequent breaks could be included in the work schedule.

The workplace layout and equipment should be designed to enable work to be completed in an upright posture.

Legal obligations

WorkSafe has identified manual handling as a priority area. Regulation 3.4 of the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996 specifically details the requirement to manage, as far as practicable, manual handling hazards in the workplace.

The regulations outline the three-step process, which involves:

- Hazard identification
- Risk assessment
- Risk control

Need more information?

Further information on the manual handling risk management process can be found in the [Manual tasks code of practice, 2000](#).

