



Continued education key for safe performance

By Nathan Deans*

Manual handling (body stressing) accounts for 41% of all serious workers' compensation claims and shows no discernable signs of abating.

In fact, the figures have hovered between 40-43% for more than a decade despite the immense interest and attention this issue has attracted during this time.

Manual handling risk identification is one of the single most critical requirements in the ongoing struggle for the prevention of manual handling, sprain and strain injuries.

Before any worker can effectively deploy strategies for minimising or reducing their injury risks, they must surely become skilled in identifying situations in their own workplace that expose them to this type of injury risk.

Knowledge gap

Recent information gathered by Body Active Consultancy (BAC) revealed that 49% of one particular underground workforce could not properly identify routine manual handling risks in their own workplace.

The concept of access and egress was by far the most recognisable scenario for the workforce in question, with 78% of the workforce correctly identifying this risk.

Given that access and egress is fundamentally different from the other concepts under the manual handling banner (as it typically involves scenarios where an individual is entering or exiting some form of vehicle, device, or machinery with the use of steps, ladders, railings and foot holes), then it is hardly surprising that this concept rated the most identifiable.

Typically, most reasonably diligent individuals will be on the look out for dangers, hazards, and risky situations within their own narrow field of reference.

Given this, they become skilled in the identification of manual handling risks that are specific to their job description, their immediate environment or within a small crew.

However, manual handling risks without that sense of immediacy to their own field of reference are often not given the full attention they deserve.

No one wants a workforce full of

individuals who are only capable of identifying their own injury risks.

In the Australian industrial workplace, a better awareness of typical manual handling risks of all jobs and tasks of the crew or team in its entirety – not just those of the individual – places everyone in a better position to be able to look out for each others' safety and wellbeing.

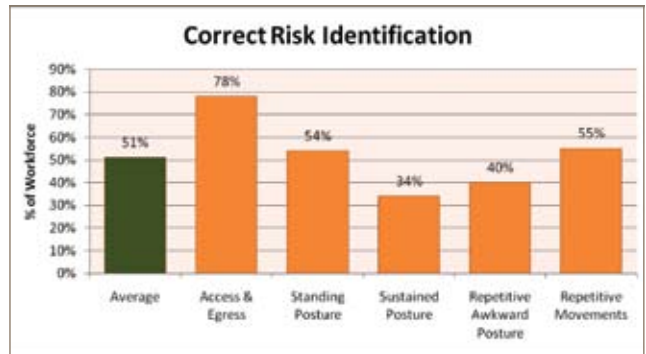
Employers and decision makers should understand the skills involved in risk identification so that design or redesign processes operate smoothly and are not hindered by mountains of red tape or finance concerns.

Possible solution

Logically, it would seem that part of the solution lies with continued education, awareness training and exposure of the workforce to the full range of manual handling risks that are presented during typical manual tasks within the workplace.

In the Western Australian mining industry alone, the average cost of a claim for musculoskeletal disorders from performing hazardous manual handling tasks was \$36,891 per lost time claim in 2007.

Up-skilling your entire workforce in risk identification and management strategies may wind up in huge savings for companies in lost time injury (LTI) compensations – not to mention positively impacting productivity.



Access and egress issues continue to have a high profile in workplace risk.

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