HEALTH & SAFETY

Safety Code of Practice:

Manual Handling of Loads

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Executive Summary

A Safety Code of Practice (SCoP) is a university-wide document that supports policies to provide detailed practical information on how to ensure compliance with relevant laws, standards, and regulations, and must be followed by all Faculties and Divisions.

SCOPs are supplemented by associated Guidance documents, which provide additional advice and information on specific topics and are intended to assist in the development of local procedures.

This document is the sixth in the Safe Management of Hazardous Procedures and Hazardous Locations C400 series of SCoPs and is intended to support managers and teams in drawing up local operational documents.

Health, Safety & Wellbeing, HR Division

Contents

1. Introduction

Incorrect manual handling technique is one of the most common causes of injury at work. It can cause work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) which account for over a third of all workplace injuries. Heavy work, awkward postures and previous or existing injury are all risk factors in developing MSDs. Other injuries can also be sustained, such as, upper limb and neck problems, fractures, crush injuries, cuts and abrasions, sprains, strains, and hernias.

The back is prone to injury caused by incorrect technique or excessive manual handling, and permanent injuries or chronic and very painful conditions can occur. Back injuries can often result in long term illness and absence from work, which can place a strain on the injured person, their family and colleagues.

When manual handling activities cannot be avoided, they must be risk assessed, with the objective of removing or reducing the risk of foreseeable injuries as far as possible. Whilst the nature and extent of manual handling may vary considerably, most roles at the University will involve some degree of manual handling activities.

This Safety Code of Practice (SCoP) sets out the standards to be achieved at the University to ensure compliance with the Manual Handling Operations Regulations (1992). It also signposts to a range of publications, tools and guidance to support the safe management of manual handling activities.

2. Scope

- This SCoP applies to all staff, students, contractors, third parties and visitors, undertaking manual handling activities as part of their work, research or education.
- It applies to all manual handling activities under the University's control, wherever these take place.
- Third parties who undertake manual handling activities on University premises are required to co-operate and co-ordinate with the University.

3. Definitions

Ergonomics – the science of designing tasks, equipment, and work environments to fit the capabilities and limitations of people, thereby reducing the risk of injury.

Load – any discrete movable object, person, or animal being transported by hand or bodily force.

Manual Handling – any transporting or supporting of a load (including lifting, putting down, pushing, pulling, carrying, or moving) by hand or bodily force.

Musculoskeletal Disorders (MDSs) – injuries or disorders affecting muscles, joints, tendons, ligaments, nerves, or other soft tissues. These include back pain, strains, sprains, and upper limb disorders.

Safe System of Work – a formal procedure that sets out how a task should be performed safely, including any equipment, training, or precautions required.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Executive Deans of Faculty and Directors of Professional Services

Executive Deans of Faculty and Directors of Professional Services are responsible for ensuring a safe system of work is in place to:

- Identify all manual handling activities that are, or may need to be, carried out within their Faculty or Division.
- Ensure that identified manual handling activities are risk assessed, and that control measures and other arrangements identified are put in place and communicated effectively.
- Put in place suitable training and supervision for those involved in manual handling activities, identifying specialist training where manual handling activities are more complex.
- Ensure arrangements are in place for responding to manual handling related incidents, and that such incidents are reported on the University incident reporting system.
- Carry out investigations into significant manual handling related incidents, with the aim of implementing remedial or improvement actions.
- Put in place arrangements for ensuring that cooperation and coordination between relevant parties during Faculty or Division arranged projects that involve manual handling.
- Ensure that facilities where manual handling activities take place, and manual handling equipment, remain in suitable condition and that records of inspection and maintenance are kept where required.
- Identify individuals who can take on the role of manual handling risk assessor.

4.2 Line Managers, Supervisors, Technical Managers and Principal Investigators

- Ensure that any tasks delegated to them through the Faculty or Division structure, in relation to manual handling, are carried out.
- Carry out manual handling risk assessments of manual handling activities that their team, or others under their control, are required to undertake.
- Ensure any manual handling risk assessors under their control receive training and remain competent.
- Make sure their staff and others under their control are aware of the outcomes and arrangements in place from manual handling risk assessments.
- Ensure that their staff and others under their control follow the measures that have been put in place to manage the risk presented by manual handling activities they undertake.
- Identify staff in their teams and others under their control who require training and supervision specifically in relation to manual handling, and ensure those identified receive this training.
- Ensure that manual handling equipment is subject to inspection and maintenance, with records kept.

- Ensure that those under their control are aware of the University's incident reporting system and that manual handling related incidents are reported, investigated and controls reviewed where required.
- Ensure that, where reasonably practicable, information about the weight and any uneven or unstable characteristics of loads is provided to those undertaking manual handling activities
- Investigate any manual handling incidents or near misses that are reported.

4.3 Staff, students, Contractors, Third Parties and Visitors

- Follow all controls and arrangements in place for managing the risks presented by manual handling tasks they need to undertake.
- Co-operate and follow safety instructions from managers, supervisors, and safety personnel in meeting health and safety responsibilities, including risk assessments and reviews.
- Make proper use of mechanical handling aids and equipment provided to reduce manual handling risks and not misuse or tamper with them.
- Report any manual handling related incidents, or defects to manual handling equipment through appropriate local reporting and escalation channels.

4.4 Manual Handling Risk Assessors

- Maintain their competence by attending Manual Handling training and regular refresher courses.
- Support those with the responsibility for carrying out manual handling risk assessments to do so.
- Seek assistance from the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team, where they believe the hazards/work activity to be assessed are outside their level of competence.

5. Requirements

5.1 Risk Assessments & Approvals

Where manual handling tasks cannot be avoided, Faculties and Divisions must observe these tasks being undertaken and compare them to manual handling templates from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Where the observed activity fits these templates and staff do not appear to be overexerting themselves, these tasks won't need to be assessed further. Where a task does not fit a template, or staff are visibly overexerted, Faculties and Divisions must use the MAC Tool or RAPP Tool from the HSE to decide if a more in-depth manual handling risk assessment is required.

If the outcome of the MAC or RAPP Tool assessment indicates that the activity is not high risk, no further assessment will be required, and the MAC or RAPP Tool assessment must be kept as a record. Where the MAC or RAPP Tool assessment indicates that the activity is high risk, a suitable and sufficient in-depth manual handling risk assessment of the activity must

be undertaken, with the aim of identifying and implementing control measures which reduce the risk presented by the task.

Faculties and Divisions must:

- Identify manual handling tasks and the hazards they present.
- Identify who will be carrying out those manual handling tasks and how they may be injured. Ensure that those at more risk of injury or ill health are also identified.
- Evaluate the risk presented by the manual handling tasks.
- Identify and implement control measures.
- Record the results of the manual handling risk assessment.
- Review the manual handling risk assessment at suitable intervals.

Faculties and Divisions must consider the Task, Individual, Load and Environment (TILE), as part of their risk assessment.

Once the manual handling risk assessment has been carried out, it must be signed off and approved by the person responsible for the activity or the area in which it is to take place.

The risk assessment must also be signed by those who will be undertaking the manual handling activity to confirm that they have read, understood, and agree to follow the arrangements that have been put in place.

The risk assessment must be reviewed periodically, and if there is a change in the way the activity is undertaken, a change in staffing, a change in the law or best practice, or if an incident occurs.

5.2 Physical Controls

5.2.1 Facilities

Facilities refer to the physical environment and fixed infrastructure that support safe movement, storage, and handling of loads. Well designed, suitably maintained, and appropriately used working environments can significantly reduce the need for hazardous manual handling activities and reduce the risk of associated injuries.

This includes consideration of building layout, access routes, flooring, lighting, doors, lifts, loading and storage areas. When these are designed or adapted with manual handling in mind, they help minimise risk by reducing awkward postures, excessive force, carrying distances, and environmental hazards.

Examples of facilities used as physical control measures include:

- Adequate storage systems, such as shelving at appropriate heights, racking, and cupboards that prevent the need for lifting from floor level or above shoulder height.
- Clear and level access routes, free from obstructions and slip or trip hazards, allowing safe movement of loads and the use of handling equipment.
- Goods lifts, hoists, and loading bays, which eliminate or reduce the need to carry heavy or bulky items up or down stairs.
- Sufficient workspace and layout design, ensuring tasks can be performed without twisting, reaching, or working in confined spaces.

- Controlled environmental conditions, including good lighting, ventilation, and temperature control, which reduce fatigue and the likelihood of handling errors.
- Suitable doors and access points, such as automatic doors or doors with adequate width and opening mechanisms, to reduce the effort required when transporting loads.

The effectiveness of facilities as a control measure relies on regular inspection, maintenance, and appropriate use. Damaged floors, poorly lit areas, blocked routes, or unsuitable storage arrangements can significantly increase manual handling risks and must be addressed promptly.

Facilities must be considered during risk assessments, building design, refurbishment, and changes to work activities. Where facilities are inadequate, manual handling risks must be reassessed and alternative or additional control measures implemented before the task proceeds.

5.2.2 Equipment

The use of equipment is a key control measure for reducing the risks associated with manual handling activities. Where manual handling operations cannot be avoided, appropriate equipment must be used to eliminate or minimise the need for lifting, carrying, pushing, or pulling loads by bodily force.

Mechanical handling aids and other equipment are designed to reduce the physical demands placed on individuals, lower the risk of musculoskeletal injury, and improve overall task efficiency. Examples include trolleys, carts, pallet trucks, hoists, lifts, conveyor systems, adjustable workbenches, and slide sheets. When effectively selected and used, such equipment can significantly reduce load weight, awkward postures, repetitive movements, and sustained force.

The selection of equipment must be informed by a suitable and sufficient risk assessment that considers the specific task, the characteristics of the load, the working environment, and the capabilities of the user. Equipment must be appropriate for the task and the setting, taking account of factors such as space constraints, floor conditions, gradients, and frequency of use.

To ensure equipment remains an effective control measure, it must be:

- Properly maintained and inspected
- Easily accessible when required
- Used only for its intended purpose
- Accompanied by clear instructions and training for users

However, the use of equipment does not remove all risk and should always be considered as part of the wider hierarchy of control.

5.3 Management Controls

5.3.1 Eliminating manual handling

When considering whether manual handling can be eliminated, Faculties and Divisions must assess whether the activity can be carried out in a different way to avoid moving the load, for example, a delivery being made directly to the storage area.

5.3.2 Ergonomic approach

Faculties and Divisions must consider the Task to be carried out, the Individual who will be carrying it out, the Load itself, and the Environment in which the task is to be carried out (TILE), and other factors that may affect the health and safety of those undertaking the manual handling task.

5.3.3 Information about load characteristics

Where reasonably practicable, information must be provided to those involved in a manual handling activity about the weight of the loads involved and any uneven or unstable characteristics, particularly in cases where loads are not self-evident.

5.3.4 Training, competency and supervision

Faculties and Divisions must provide training to those involved in manual handling activities, including the safe use of any equipment, to ensure they are aware of the measures in place to keep them safe. Records must be kept that demonstrate what training takes place.

Those with management or supervisory roles must ensure that their teams are competent in carrying out the tasks they are required to.

Faculties and Divisions must nominate a member of staff as a Manual Handling Risk Assessor to support others with the responsibility for carrying out such risk assessments.

5.4 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Faculties and Divisions must give consideration in their risk assessment to PPE that may be required to protect those involved in the task. For example, the provision of thick gloves when carrying out a manual handling activity in a cold environment.

Consideration must also be given to the selection of such PPE, ensuring that it does not create new risks for those carrying out the activity, such as thick gloves potentially leading to a loss of dexterity and therefore a greater risk of dropping the load.

6. Emergency Arrangements

6.1 Emergency Planning & Preparation

This section is not relevant to the scope of this document.

6.2 Emergency Response & First Aid

Faculties and Divisions must consider foreseeable first aid incidents that may arise from the manual handling tasks carried out. They must decide whether the existing University first aid provision in terms of Local First Aiders and first aid equipment are sufficient to respond to such an incident.

Where additional resource may be required, Faculties and Divisions must carry out a first aid needs assessment to identify what additional personnel and equipment are required. Faculties and Divisions must then ensure that the additional resource is put in place.

6.3 Reporting Incidents & Accidents

Faculties and Divisions must ensure that any incidents, accidents or near misses that occur in relation to a manual handling activity are reported on the University's incident reporting system.

Faculties and Divisions must ensure that when an incident, accident or near miss occurs, that this is followed up with those concerned to make sure they are recovering, and to find out if anything can be done to prevent or reduce the likelihood of a repeat incident.

For more significant manual handling related incidents, where the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team carry out an investigation, Faculties and Divisions must support this process.

7. Transport

This section is not relevant to the scope of this document.

8. Monitoring & Assurance

Faculties and Divisions must implement local arrangements for ensuring that control measures from manual handling risk assessments are implemented and followed.

The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team will monitor the implementation of this SCoP through inspection, audit, review of reported incidents, and the review of the number of manual handling related referrals to the University's occupational health provider.

9. Records & Retention Requirements

Manual handling risk assessments must be retained for 5 years once they have been superseded by an updated version.

Any formal procedures relating to manual handling must be retained for 10 years once superseded by an updated version.

Inspection records and audits relating to manual handling must be retained for 10 years following completion of any actions that were identified.

10. Further Information / Guidance

- HS G403 Guidance for Manual Handling – Pushing and Pulling (to follow)
- HS G404 Guidance for Manual Handling – Cylinders and Long Narrow Loads (to follow)
- HS G405 Guidance on in-depth Manual Handling Risk Assessment (to follow)

11. Legislation & Standards

- Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992
- HSE Manual Handling Guidance on Regulations (L23)

12. References

- Manual Handling webpage
- HSE Simple Manual Handling Filters
- HSE MAC Tool
- HSE RAPP Tool

13. Appendices

This section is not relevant to the scope of this document.

14. Document Control

Document title:	Safety Code of Practice: Manual Handling of Loads
Document ID code:	HS C406
Date approved:	22nd April 2026
Approving body:	Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team
Controlled copies:	Uncontrolled if in hard-copy – master copy resides on Box.
Last review date:	N/A
Revision history:	v1.0 – April 2026
Retention Period:	5 years after superseded
Next review date:	April 2029
Related documents:	Manual Handling : A to Z of health and safety : Health and Safety : Schools and services : University of Sussex
Document Owner:	Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team
Point of Contact:	Mike Young