

SAFETY ALERT!



Manual material handling and ergonomics

The purpose of this safety alert is to alert employers and employees of the risk and consequences when handling materials incorrectly and of the importance of ergonomics.

Background

Makrosafe clients reported **75** incidents in 2013, in which employees were injured due to incorrect handling of materials and/or poor ergonomics. Altogether the employers, lost **315** workings days' of activity which translated into a cost of **R 123,480.00**.

One employee lifted goods incorrectly and hurt his lower back. Initially he was booked off work for **8.5** days at a cost of **R 3,212.00** to the company. But future claims to the compensation commissioner have not been ruled out as he hurt his back at work.

Contributing factors

- The employee tried to lift a heavy object off the floor, which had fallen off a delivery truck, by bending over.
- The employee didn't lift by bending his legs: he bent his back.
- The employee grossly over-estimated his strength.
- The company had turned a blind eye to a culture of employees not accepting 'weak' employees.
- Due to the cold temperature inside the workplace the muscles in the back were very stiff.
- A crane, which could have been used to lift the material, was overlooked.
- The company allowed suppliers to dictate how, and in what quantities, supplies were delivered.
- The employee wanted to clear the area as quickly as possible to ensure another vehicle could go past.

Action Required

- Ensure that working conditions are comfortable in terms of space, ventilation, temperature, etc.
- Stimulate employees to make use of whatever tool is available, rather than abusing their bodies.
- Ensure each employee is recognised and respects his limitations, as well as those of colleague(s).
- Discuss deliveries with suppliers and, where necessary, have heavy loads broken down into smaller portions.
- Use ramps to lift items to a higher level.
- Ensure that items that have to be lifted are placed at the 'power zone' height (mid-thigh to mid-chest).
- Stimulate employees to do small exercises while on duty to keep the muscles and body warm and flexible.
- Keep the height and distance for lifting and moving objects as small as possible.

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