

MANUAL HANDLING

Risk Identification

By Nathan Deans

Manual handling accidents remain the pre-dominant cause of lost time injuries in many sectors including mining.

Manual handling (body stressing) accounts for 41 per cent of all serious workers' compensation claims and shows no discernable signs of abating. In fact, the figures have hovered between 40 per cent and 43 per cent for more than a decade despite the immense interest and attention this issue has attracted during this time.

In a recent workshop, 49 per cent of underground miners could not properly identify routine manual handling risks in their own workplace.

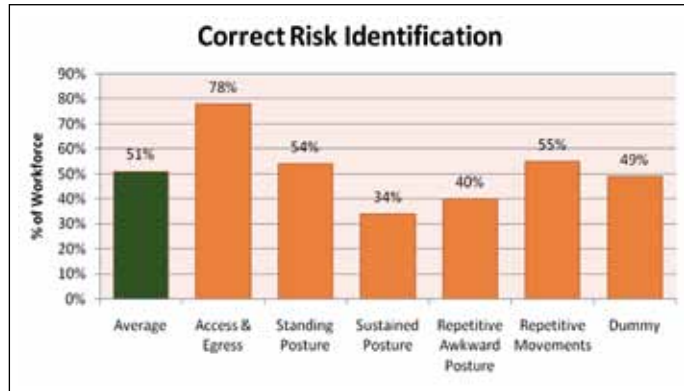
In an ongoing project for BAC, working with one of Australia's leading underground mining companies in northern Australia, a series of workshops were held to assess the workforce's level of awareness about different types of manual handling risks specific to their work tasks, performed on a daily basis and the respective locations where the work took place.

The workers were presented with a series of photographs showing typical workplace situations and asked to identify the primary manual handling risk depicted in these photographs from a list of five common manual handling components.

The manual handling components were Access and Egress, Standing Posture, Sustained Posture, Repetitive Awkward Posture and Repetitive Movements.

Several 'dummy' photographs were also included in the series - which did not depict any identifiable manual handling risks - and that the workers were expected to leave blank.

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 covered in this exercise - 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.

The inability of 51 per cent of the workforce in question to correctly identify the 'dummy' scenarios presents its own unique set of concerns. Just as an inability to identify risky situations is a concern, so too is an inability to identify scenarios not depicting manual handling risks.

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.

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

However, this introduces some issues that have not yet been considered which may, or may not, impact heavily on this process. Underground mining comprises a large

number of narrowly defined job tasks with a bare minimum of job / task sharing or rotation if at all. Rarely will a Jumbo or Solo operator switch tasks and do the shotcreting or vice-versa.

The outcome is that workers are becoming reasonably adept

at identifying the manual handling risks associated with tasks that are specific to their own job descriptions, but are falling down when it comes to identifying the risks that are associated with the work tasks of their colleagues.

No one wants a workforce full of individuals who are only capable of identifying their own injury risks. In underground mining and drilling work environments, as in all similar crew or team-based work group situations, 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 well being.

BAC is in the process of identifying and cataloguing an extensive range of these potentially risky manual handling tasks, specific to many mining and drilling applications, with a view to developing a 'cross-tasking' education and training package. Delivery of this education and training course to the entire workforce will expand the combined knowledge and awareness of risky manual handling tasks across all job specifications; ultimately resulting in a safer and more productive workplace for all underground miners.

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