

# Materials Handling Safety



## Prime Causes of Materials Handling Accidents

- Lack of training
- Wrong handling equipment chosen for the job (too big, too small, not designed for the load it's carrying or lifting)
- Overloading equipment
- Hurrying and taking shortcuts
- Fatigue and wandering attention
- Not following the rules

**Don't forget:** Most materials handling accidents are preventable. Don't let an accident happen to you.

## Back Belts: Helpful or Harmful?

Back belts do support weak back muscles, but they can also give you a false sense of security and lead you to lift a too-heavy load, putting you at risk for injury.

**Your best bet:** Whether you wear a back belt or not, strengthen your abdominal muscles. Strong abs take the strain off your lower back and give you strength and balance for standing and lifting.

## FORKLIFT DO'S AND DON'TS

- DON'T** place too-heavy or improperly balanced loads on the lift.
- DO** keep the fork low, with the mast tilted slightly back to keep the lift from tipping over.
- DON'T** speed up to get the job done faster.
- DO** follow speed limits and lower your speed if carrying a large load.
- DON'T** raise or lower forks while moving.
- DO** drive backward if a load impairs your forward vision.
- DON'T** make sharp turns or turn on a grade — you could tip over.
- DO** slow down on uneven ground and watch out for holes and bumps.
- DON'T** carry a passenger on a forklift.
- DO** use your horn at intersections and watch out for other lifts or pedestrians.

If you're working in a forklift area, keep a safe distance from moving lifts, stay clear of their turning radius and make sure the driver can see you or knows where you are.

## Let Your Equipment Work for You

Using materials handling equipment to get the job done? Be smart. Familiarize yourself with safety precautions, make sure all guards and protective devices are in place, and never take a shortcut or lift a too-heavy load in order to get more work done.

**Remember:** Equipment such as cranes, forklifts and even back belts are only "labor saving" when used correctly. Nothing is saved if you're sidelined with an injury.

## Keep Hands and Fingers Out of Harm's Way

Materials handling equipment such as conveyor belts can have a high risk of crushing or pinching fragile fingers. **What to do:**

- Familiarize yourself with the location of the emergency shut-off button or cord.
- If a conveyor is stopped, ensure that all personnel are clear of it before restarting.
- Never lean, stand or ride on a conveyor or other equipment.
- Do not remove safety guards.
- If you get sleepy or feel your attention wandering, take a break.
- Pay attention to signs and markers that alert you to the pinch and crush points on equipment.
- Before clearing or repairing conveyors and other equipment, disconnect the power source and follow proper lockout/tagout procedures.



## LIFTING AND CARRYING CORRECTLY

1. Get close to the load, as if you're hugging the object.
2. Stay upright. Keep a normal, upright posture as you lift.
3. Tighten your stomach muscles (but don't hold your breath).
4. Lift with your legs. They're the strongest muscles you have.

5. Turn with your feet. Don't twist your back as you're carrying an object.

6. Carry an object close to your body. Enlist a colleague's help, or use a wheeled cart or other moving device if the object is too heavy for you to carry comfortably by yourself.

Never bend over from the waist to lift an object, no matter how light it is — you could strain your back.

Don't lift objects down from shelves that are too high to reach. Use a sturdy stepladder and keep the object close to your body to avoid twisting your spine.

**The bottom line:** Your arms and legs are built for lifting and carrying. Use them to do the work, and save your back.



## Watch Out Below

Whenever you are using a crane or hoist, or working around one, be sure to follow these safety precautions.

- Never walk underneath a loaded crane or hoist.
- Devise hand signals between operator and loading personnel to communicate when it is a safe time to lift or move the load.
- Make sure slings, hooks and other attachments are latched securely and functioning properly.
- Never overload a hoist or crane — follow the capacity recommendations to the letter.
- Perform regular inspections and maintenance on the crane or hoist as well as the lifting chains, hooks and attachments.
- Report any equipment problems to a supervisor immediately.
- Never touch a load while the equipment is moving.
- Before beginning a task, ask yourself: Can the path be shortened? Can the load be broken into smaller units? Think through the entire route the load will travel.