

## Toolbox Talk # 1.03 – Back Safety

Heavy objects on construction sites are usually lifted by forklifts, hoists, platforms, cranes, and other types of materials-handling equipment. However, it's often necessary to load or unload moderate to heavy objects by hand. When that is the case, knowing the proper ways to lift can save you a great deal of pain and misery from a sprained back.

1. **Size up the load before trying to lift it** — Test the weight by lifting at one of the corners. If the load is too heavy or of an awkward shape, the best thing to do is:
  - a. get help from a fellow worker,
  - b. use a mechanical lifting device like a dolly or,
  - c. if you must lift, make sure you can handle the weight.
2. **Bend the knees** — This is the single most important rule when lifting moderate to heavy objects. Take a tip from professional weight lifters. They can lift tremendous weights because they lift with their legs, not their backs. When lifting a crate or box, your feet should be placed close to the object. Center yourself over the load, then bend your knees and get a good hand hold. Lift straight up, smoothly. Allow your legs, not your back, to do the work.
3. **Do not twist or turn your body once you have made the lift** — Keep the load close to your body, and keep it steady. Any sudden twisting or turning could result in taking out your back.
4. **Make sure you can carry the load where you need to go before attempting to move it** — Also, make sure your path is clear of obstacles and that there are no hazards, such as holes or spilled liquids in your path. Construction sites can be full of such hazards, so this is a particularly important consideration. Turn your body by changing foot positions, and make sure of your footing before setting out.
5. **Set the load down properly** — Setting the load down is just as important as lifting it. Lower the load slowly by bending your knees, letting your legs do most of the work. Don't let go of the load until it is secure on the floor.
6. **Always push, not pull the object when possible** — When moving an object on rollers, for example, pushing puts less strain on the back and is safer, should the object tip.

Planning ahead makes sense. If you know certain loads will have to be carried from an unloading area, place the objects on racks, not on the ground, whenever possible. That way the load will not have to be lifted from the ground. Do not attempt to carry loads that are clearly too heavy for you. Long objects, such as pipes and lumber, may not be heavy, but the weight might not be balanced and such lifting could also result in back sprain. Such objects should be carried by two more people.

If the load can be split up into smaller ones, you're better off in doing that, even if loading takes a few extra minutes. Trying to lift it all at once or even two or three loads may be asking for trouble when the weight is great.

By using common sense, you can help keep your back out of trouble. Every time you think about lifting, think defensively about your back and the possibility of a back sprain. Follow good lifting techniques, not only at work, but also at home.

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Project: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Other safety issues covered or comments from crew members:

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### Attendees:

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