

Manual Handling Guidance for Local URC Churches

This guidance applies to local churches, church halls, church offices, manses and all activities undertaken by employees, ministers, volunteers, Elders, trustees and contractors on behalf of the church.

Purpose

The United Reformed Church (the URC) is committed to preventing injuries arising from manual handling activities.

This guidance has been developed in accordance with:

- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended)
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance on manual handling at work

Its purpose is to ensure that manual handling activities are properly assessed and carried out safely, thereby reducing the risk of musculoskeletal injuries, strains, sprains and long-term health problems.

Scope

This guidance applies to all manual handling activities carried out on behalf of the church, including:

- Moving chairs, and tables
- Setting up worship spaces
- Delivering or storing supplies
- Moving audio-visual equipment
- Handling food bank donations
- Lifting boxes and archives
- Moving hymn books and literature
- Christmas and Easter displays
- Transporting cleaning materials
- Grounds maintenance activities
- Storage and housekeeping tasks

This guidance applies equally to:

- Employees
- Ministers
- Elders and trustees
- Volunteers
- Church members undertaking church activities
- Contractors

What is Manual Handling?

Manual handling means any transporting or supporting of a load by hand or bodily force. Manual handling includes:

- Lifting
- Lowering
- Carrying
- Pushing
- Pulling
- Moving
- Holding
- Supporting

A load may be:

- An object
- Furniture
- Equipment
- Stored materials
- Waste or recycling items
- Deliveries and supplies

Manual handling injuries remain one of the most common causes of workplace musculoskeletal disorders.

Key Principles

HSE requires employers and organisations to follow a hierarchy of control.

Step 1: Avoid Manual Handling Where Possible

Consider:

- Delivering items directly to where they are needed
- Using wheeled equipment
- Reorganising storage arrangements
- Breaking loads into smaller quantities

Step 2: Assess the Risk

Where manual handling cannot be avoided:

- Assess the task
- Identify hazards
- Consider who may be harmed
- Implement controls

Step 3: Reduce the Risk

Where risks are identified:

- Use handling aids
- Reduce load weights
- Improve storage arrangements
- Provide information, instruction and training

Common Manual Handling Activities in Churches

Examples include:

- Moving stacking chairs
- Setting out tables for events
- Transporting communion supplies
- Moving sound systems and speakers
- Relocating filing boxes
- Handling food bank deliveries
- Carrying bags of refuse
- Moving seasonal decorations
- Delivering and storing cleaning products
- Carrying flower arrangements
- Moving display boards and exhibition materials

These activities should be assessed where there is a foreseeable risk of injury.

Manual Handling Risk Assessment

Before undertaking significant manual handling activities, consideration should be given to:

The Task

- How often will the activity occur?
- How long will it take?
- Is twisting required?
- Is bending or reaching required?
- Is the activity repetitive?

The Load

- Is it heavy?
- Is it bulky?
- Is it difficult to grip?
- Is it unstable?
- Could contents shift during handling?

The Individual

- Does the person have any health issues that may affect lifting?
- Are they physically capable?
- Are they familiar with safe handling techniques?

The Environment

- Is there sufficient space?
- Is the floor surface safe?
- Are there trip hazards?
- Is lighting adequate?
- Is weather a factor?

These principles reflect HDS's established manual handling assessment model.

Safe Manual Handling Techniques

Individuals undertaking manual handling should:

Before Lifting

- Assess the load
- Plan the route
- Remove obstacles
- Ensure a firm footing
- Use handling aids where available

During Lifting

- Keep the load close to the body
- Maintain a stable position
- Bend the knees
- Keep the back as straight as possible
- Lift smoothly
- Move your feet when turning

Avoid

- Twisting the body while carrying
- Jerking movements
- Attempting to catch a falling load
- Carrying loads which block vision
- Lifting beyond personal capability

Team Lifting

Team lifting may be appropriate when:

- Loads are awkward
- Loads are bulky
- Loads cannot be safely lifted by one person

Before commencing:

- Appoint one person to coordinate the lift
- Agree movements in advance
- Ensure everyone understands their role
- Lift and lower together

Team lifting does not eliminate risk and should only be used where suitable.

Mechanical Aids

Churches should consider providing:

- Sack trucks
- Trolleys

- Wheeled storage units
- Platform trucks
- Folding transport carts

Mechanical aids should be used wherever reasonably practicable to reduce manual handling risks.

Volunteers and Manual Handling

Many church activities rely on volunteers. Volunteers should:

- Only undertake tasks they feel capable of completing safely
- Report concerns immediately
- Seek assistance where required
- Use mechanical aids where available

No person should be pressured into lifting or carrying an item.

Older Members and Physical Capability

Particular consideration should be given where individuals:

- Have mobility issues
- Have existing back problems
- Have arthritis or joint conditions
- Are recovering from illness or injury
- Experience balance difficulties

Churches should never assume willingness equates to capability. Alternative arrangements should be considered where necessary.

Storage Arrangements

To reduce manual handling risks:

Heavy Items

Store:

- Between knee and shoulder height
- Close to the point of use
- On secure shelving

Avoid

- Storing heavy items at floor level
- Storing heavy items above shoulder height

Housekeeping

Storage areas should:

- Be well lit
- Be kept tidy
- Have clear access routes

- Avoid overloading shelving

Deliveries and Collections

Where church deliveries are received:

- Confirm who is responsible for unloading
- Avoid handling excessive quantities at once
- Use trolley where possible
- Ensure access routes are clear

Large deliveries should be assessed before movement begins.

Contractors

Where contractors are engaged to move heavy items or equipment, the church should ensure:

- The contractor is competent
- Suitable equipment is provided
- Risk assessment are completed where necessary

Contractors must comply with their own health and safety responsibilities.

Training and Information

Individuals who regularly undertake manual handling activities should receive:

- Information on manual handling hazards
- Instruction on safe lifting techniques
- Awareness of church procedures
- Information on reporting concerns

Training should be proportionate to the level of risk involved.

The HSE recognizes that training alone is not enough and should be used alongside practical risk reduction measures.

Accident and Near-Miss Reporting

The following should be reported:

- Manual handling injuries
- Back strains
- Sprains
- Near misses
- Equipment failures

Reports should be reviewed to identify opportunities for improvement.

Responsibilities

Church Elders/Trustees

Must:

- Ensure risks are assessed
- Provide suitable equipment where appropriate
- Implement reasonable control measures
- Monitor manual handling risks

Employees and Volunteers

Must:

- Follow this guidance
- Use equipment correctly
- Report hazards
- Stop work if unsafe conditions arise

Manual Handling Safety Checklist

Before moving any load, ask:

- ☐ Can the load be moved without manual handling?
- ☐ Can a trolley or other aid be used?
- ☐ Is the route clear?
- ☐ Is the load stable?
- ☐ Is assistance required?
- ☐ Can the load be lifted safely?
- ☐ Are there any health concerns affecting the person lifting?
- ☐ Has the task been properly planned?

If the answer to any of these questions is **No**, stop and reassess the task.