



South Cumbria &
North Lancashire Branch

Joint meeting 13th December 2018



South Cumbria Occupational
Health & Safety Group

Topic: *A practical approach to workplace manual handling*

Speaker: Paul Barden, Director, Get Set Training, Leeds

Venue: The Netherwood Hotel, Grange-over-Sands, Cumbria LA11 6ET

Jim Tongue, Chairman, *South Cumbria & North Lancashire IOSH Branch*, welcomed members to the meeting. He then introduced Paul to the group.

Paul said that his session would be interactive and would not involve the use of *PowerPoint* slides because he preferred to use flip charts and practical demonstrations.

Paul reminded members that the *Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992* (as amended) applies to all workplace tasks that involve lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling or carrying. They define manual handling as:

"...any transporting or supporting of a load (including the lifting, putting down, pushing, pulling, carrying or moving thereof) by hand or bodily force".

The load can be an object, person or animal and, as with all risk assessments, manual handling risk assessments need to follow *HSE's* recommended risk assessment hierarchy:

1. **Avoid** hazardous manual handling operations so far as is reasonably practicable by using other methods such as trolleys, fork lift trucks pulleys etc...
2. **Assess** the optimum way of undertaking any hazardous manual handling operations that cannot be avoided and involve the employees who will be undertaking the task in this process.
3. **Reduce** the risk of injury so far as is reasonably practicable.

Paul explained that he had reservations about some of the published manual handling guidance because much of the advice was based on lifting a uniform box in an unobstructed area whereas most difficult workplace manual handling problems involved lifting various shaped objects into awkward spaces at awkward angles. He said that the guidance often included diagrams and pictures of a person with the box between their legs and instructions to bend both legs and lift the box from the floor between their legs and close to the body.

He explained his reservations about this method using an articulated model of a leg skeleton that he held against his own leg to demonstrate the position of his leg as he led a discussion about the optimum positions for the legs when lifting. It became clear from this discussion that the optimum position for a simple lift was with the legs apart and one leg slightly forward to maintain balance. He demonstrated this with a volunteer as they instinctively prepared their stance before trying to push one another backwards.

Paul also generated some useful discussions about other key considerations when assessing manual handling tasks such as:

- *The individual's capability:* age, experience, physical fitness etc....
- *The nature of the load:* weight, shape, etc....
- *Environmental conditions:* inside, outside, room to manoeuvre, characteristics of and distance between original and new location.
- Training needs – is it appropriate for the task?
- *Work organisation* – will the task impact on other workers? Does it require more than one person? etc...

Paul then led a discussion on other things that need to be considered before undertaking manual handling tasks. These included:

- Double checking that there isn't a viable alternative to manual handling such as use of a trolley or pulleys etc...
- Removing any obstructions from the manual handling area.
- Length of carry - planning to rest the load midway, on a table or bench, to change grip and/or rest if appropriate.
- Ensuring that employees undertaking manual tasks do not wear unsuitable clothing or footwear that might affect their ability to undertake their task safely

Paul said that the most important aspect of manual handling was that managers and employees needed to understand the impact that poor manual handling techniques could have on their long-term health, especially the lumbar region of their spines. He emphasised that it is important that employees are given training that takes account of their work environment and that provides them with clear information about potential injuries arising from poor lifting techniques. They also need to understand why it is important to start the lift from a stable position with their feet apart and one leg in front of the other help maintain balance.

Throughout the session there was some lively and wide-ranging discussion where members gave examples of manual handling problems that they had encountered in their workplaces and how they resolved them and exchanged advice about problems that they were still trying to resolve.

Jim then thanked Paul for coming to speak to our group and for generating such a worthwhile discussion session. He presented him with a small token of members' appreciation before encouraging everyone to network with one another and to take the opportunity to speak to Paul over tea or coffee and biscuits.

Paul can be contacted via: <http://www.getsettraining.co.uk/>

Related HSE web site links:

Risk at work - manual handling: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/manual.htm>

Advice for employers: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/backpain/employers/mhor.htm>

Manual handling FAQs: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/backpain/employers/mhor.htm>

Manual handling assessment charts (MAC): <http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/mac/>