

Watch Those Loads!

We're all aware how hazardous a sharp tool or a toxic chemical can be in its ability to cause severe injury. But the heavy objects we handle every day can be just as hazardous. The "worst-case" scenario is losing the load. In a slapstick comedy, this might be amusing, but in real life, it's anything but funny. Mishandling a heavy load can result in serious injury—or even death.

The most common injury resulting from improper material handling is back strain. Another is lacerations from the sharp ends and edges of steel and plastic straps. Pinches, bumps, and bruises may be less serious, but painful nonetheless.

That's why it's very important that we carefully follow established safety procedures when transporting heavy objects.

One of the best ways to avoid overexertion is to use a dolly or handcart to carry the load for you. However, this method has its own hazards. Be sure to use safe lifting techniques when loading the truck. Also, follow these steps to prevent injury:

- Choose a dolly or handcart that is the right size and shape for the object(s) that you are going to carry.
- Place the heaviest objects on the bottom.
- Position the load over the truck's axles so that the truck, not the handles, carries the weight.
- Secure bulky, irregular, or fragile items to the truck.

As you begin to move, it is important to avoid all possible hazards that may be in the way. This means, first and foremost, **look where you're going**. You should:

- Avoid walking backwards. If you must do so, make sure the route is clear and have a co-worker guide you (as to turns, obstacles, etc.).
- Make sure that you can see over the load.
- Move slowly and cautiously.
- Watch out for objects on the floor or obstructions in the way, and be especially alert to edges of platforms and docks.
- Avoid pedestrians and vehicles.
- Keep the load ahead of you when you go downhill.

Rope and strapping are most commonly used to secure the load to the truck or dolly. Again, some simple precautions will make your work easier and safer:

- Make sure the rope is in good condition before using it. Inspect it and test it by pulling on it.
- Keep the rope away from corrosives like acid.
- To avoid injury from sharp edges of strapping, use safety gloves.
- Cut off loose strap ends with cutters, not clawhammers or pry bars.
- Make sure the strapping is taut, but not too tight, around the objects.
- Don't lift by the strap unless it's designed for that purpose.

If we take the time to follow those easy procedures, we can avoid some of the most common—and harmful—accidents.

