

Argriculture – Safe Lifting & Carrying

Improper lifting techniques are responsible for a large percentage of back injuries among agricultural workers. Proper methods of lifting and handling protect against injury, and make work easier. You need to "think" about what you are going to do before bending to pick up an object. Over time, safe lifting technique should become a habit. Following are the basics steps of safe lifting and handling.

1. Size up the load and check overall conditions. Don't attempt the lift by yourself if the load appears to be too heavy or awkward. Check that there is enough space for movement, and that the footing is good. "Good housekeeping" ensures that you won't trip or stumble over an obstacle.
2. Make certain that your balance is good. Feet should be shoulder width apart, with one foot beside and the other foot behind the object to be lifted.
3. Bend the knees; don't stoop. Keep the back straight, but not vertical. (There is a difference. Tucking in the chin straightens the back.)
4. Grip the load with the palms of your hands and your fingers. The palm grip is much more secure. Tuck in your chin again to make certain your back is straight before starting to lift.
5. Use your body weight to start the load moving, then lift by pushing up with the legs. This makes full use of the strongest muscles.
6. Keep the arms and elbows close to the body while lifting.
7. Carry the load close to the body. Don't twist your body while carrying the load. To change direction, shift your foot position and turn your whole body.
8. Watch where you are going!
9. To lower the object, bend the knees. Don't bend over. To deposit the load on a bench or shelf, place it on the edge and push it into position. Make sure your hands and feet are clear when placing the load.

Make it a habit to follow the above steps when lifting anything - even a relatively light object. Team lifting must be coordinated. If the weight, shape, or size of an object makes the job too much for one person, ask for help. Ideally, workers should be of approximately the same size for team lifting. One individual needs to be responsible for control of the action to ensure proper co-ordination. If one worker lifts too soon, shifts the load, or lowers it improperly, either they or the person working with them may be injured.

Lifting heavy objects - Safe lifting of heavy items requires training and practice. For example, you've probably seen a small person move heavy feed sacks with apparent ease. The secret lies in taking the proper stance and grip. When powered equipment is available (forklift, pallet jack, etc.), it should be used to lift and carry heavy objects.