

Manual Handling: Change the Lift Before You Lift

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v1.0 | Reviewed October 6, 2026 | Discussion + field checks

Why this matters

A load's weight is only part of the job. Reach, grip, repetition, footing and the place you set it down all affect the effort required. Change the handling setup before asking someone to work harder.

Objective: Choose a suitable handling method and verify the route, equipment and set-down before movement.

Key hazards or failure points

Unknown or shifting loads; poor grip; awkward reach or twisting; repeated exertion; damaged wheels; slopes or thresholds; trapped fingers; nowhere safe to set down.

Practical controls

- Reduce handling where possible. Arrange delivery near use, divide loads when appropriate, or use a suitable mechanical aid. Have the task assessed when its demands or safe method are uncertain.
- Identify the load's weight, size, stability and grip points using reliable information. Match the handling aid and attachments to the load and conditions. Only trained and authorized people operate equipment.
- Prepare the route and receiving area. Arrange help and clear commands when coordinated handling is part of the assessed method. A second person does not automatically make an unsuitable lift safe.

Verify It in the Field

Before touching the load, walk the planned route from a safe position. Check doorways, surface condition, obstructions, changes in level and the set-down. Resolve any point that would force a sudden reach, twist or unstable movement.

Compare the identified load with the equipment's rated capacity, intended use and instructions. Complete prescribed condition and function checks, including relevant wheels, brakes and attachments. Do not use your body to test an unknown weight or a defective aid.

Rehearse positions and commands without the hazardous load. Confirm room for hands and feet and a controlled way to stop. Record the method, load information, equipment check and unresolved limits; monitor repeated work for discomfort or growing difficulty.

Stop and reassess

Pause for uncertain load information, damaged equipment, a blocked route, slipping grip, unexpected movement, pain or excessive effort. Lower or secure the load by the planned safe method, get help and reassess. Correct and recheck before continuing; never try to catch a falling load.

Ask the crew

1. What change could remove or reduce this manual handling?
2. Where will this load go, and is that area ready?
3. What finding would make us choose a different method?

Before movement: make the handling method fit the whole task.

Sources: NIOSH ergonomics guidance; actual handling-equipment instructions and task assessment.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance, references, supervisor check and attendance record accompany this talk.