Incident Alert

28 September 2017

Back Injury from Unsafe Storage

Incident Details

A courier delivered equipment to the wrong location, requiring a worker to retrieve the large, heavy item from the receiving unit. The box weighed 35 kg, so the worker sought help from a colleague and brought a trolley to help transport the goods.

The receiving unit placed the box on a low-height shelf and as the worker reached to pull the box forward to put into the trolley, he felt a twinge in his lower back. About 30 minutes later, he began to experience tension in his back and neck and within 12 hours was unable to stand upright without acute pain in the neck. He required multiple doctor’s visits, allied health treatments, and over a week to recover enough to return to work.

Contributing Factors

This task was not a normal task performed by the worker. Normally, equipment is delivered directly to the point of use in their office, to avoid unnecessary handling. As the item was delivered to the wrong location, the worker was not in control of how or where the equipment was temporarily stored.

Placing the equipment on a low shelf required awkward postures to retrieve the equipment. Due to the weight and size of the box, there were limited safe postures available to retrieve the box.

Ideally, the box would have been stored directly on the floor to facilitate easy transfer to a hand truck dolly, or stored on a trolley that could have been borrowed by the collecting organisational unit.

Alternatively, as the organisational unit that received the equipment are more accustomed to moving equipment on and off their shelves, it would have been more appropriate for their staff to retrieve the box from the shelf and place it in a neutral position, such as on the floor, from which the collecting staff could then access it.

Key Learnings and Recommendations

All workers have obligations under the Work Health and Safety Act to ensure the way we conduct our work does not adversely affect the health and safety and others.

Goods and equipment must be stored safely, considering access and retrieval by all potential users.

For more advice, consult Manual Tasks Risk Management procedures and guidelines for strategies on minimising risk of injury to UQ staff and students for common UQ tasks:

https://ppl.app.uq.edu.au/content/2.50.01-manual-tasks-risk-management

Hazardous Manual Tasks Code of Practice 2011:


Could this happen anywhere your staff, students or you are working?

This alert is a reminder for you and your work unit to consider the effectiveness of your local safety management system in preventing an incident like this from occurring at a workplace.

Contact for Additional Information

For further information, contact your local Work Health and Safety Manager/Coordinator, or the UQ OHS Division:

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