

# Mind your BACK!

**Jon Allbutt concludes his three part series on Health and Safety issues which affect greenkeepers.**

It is a depressing thought that my own back problems, earned after over 30 years of abusing simple principles of correct lifting!, puts me in the that large group of people where it is not even a topic for discussion. It seems to be unusual to find someone of my generation without a back problem, even more depressing is the fact that we all know how it happened! And yet we are not taking some simple steps to ensure the next generation are able to walk upright, don't need painkillers, can play sport and work without fear of ending up laying on the floor for days! Why is it that we accept physical injury as an inevitable result of a lifetime at work. Have you examined your accident records, or staff sickness records lately? Have you calculated the number of days lost in the last year connected to work related injuries, sometimes old ones that keep recurring?. Well I do; as part of my health and safety inspection of clubs I ask to see the records, and to be honest, they make boring reading because of their similarity. I could almost predict the numbers of days off with arm, leg and back strains; the accident book entries for slips, trips and other injuries that happen involving handling of equipment and unsafe work practices.

It is also interesting that many employers are failing in their duties to report these accidents and illnesses as required by the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995; yes, 1995, these Regulations have been revised and extended so make sure you obtain the free leaflet "RIDDOR - Everyone's guide to RIDDOR '95" (HSE 31) available from HSE Books or their agents.

The Manual Handling of Loads Regulations 1992, and also the accompanying HSE guides and leaflets, make the position clear:

"Each employer shall so far as is reasonably practicable, avoid the need for his employees to

undertake any manual handling operations at work which involve a risk of their being injured"... "make a suitable and sufficient assessment of all such manual handling operations to be undertaken by them." (Regulation 4).

This means that the employer (who must be competent to carry out the work, or employ someone who is) identifies those aspects of the work that are likely to result in injury. In conducting a risk assessment of each identified task a decision must be made whether risk can be avoided by changes in design, or the use of mechanical equipment. If it cannot be avoided then staff may need to change work practices to reduce the risks of injury. A good example of this is to use a two man lift instead of struggling on ones own and risking an injury.

In identifying those manual handling tasks that can be eliminated by changes in design and work practices the following key areas are common in greenkeeping:

1. The delivery and subsequent manhandling of goods such as bags of fertilisers, pallets of turf etc. can be mechanically handled by the use of pedestrian controlled fork lift or pallet trucks. In this example it will be necessary to ensure yard and shed surfaces are sound and have no steps; this may involve some resurfacing work. Some doors will need changes of width and height to accommodate pallets and trucks. By making such changes in work practices there is also the opportunity of increasing operational efficiency by 20%, or more.

2. Hitching implements where staff have no formal training in tractor driving or hitching procedures. The common technique of dragging the implement to the tractor is incorrect and unsafe. The risk of injury is increased when the yard is unsurfaced and muddy with the chance of a slip or a fall. To avoid injury staff should be trained and supervised to see that the correct procedures are followed.

3. Loading/unloading equipment such as mowers on and off trailers without proper ramps or low loaders. There are some very

good designs of small low loader trailers that are ideal for carrying small machines behind utility trucks.

4. In the workshop where cutter units and other equipment needs to be lifted onto benches, often without any help, there is a risk of injuries to arms, legs and back. By providing a hydraulic platform or mobile hydraulic workbench the risk is almost eliminated

Regulation 4 also requires that the employer carries out training of staff (or arranges for it to be carried out) in safe handling techniques that are directly relevant to the workplace and uses the risk assessments to ensure staff are fully aware of their duties.

The Regulations also require that the significant findings of the risk assessments be recorded and made available for the use of staff.

The consequences of not carrying out these essential risk assessments and implementing an accident reduction programme, will be a continuing loss of time at work, the risk of staff being seriously injured and possibly unable to continue due to partial disablement.

There is of course another reason for dealing with this important health and safety problem; an employer has already been prosecuted under these Regulations following an investigation into an accident involving an employee who injured his back at work.

There are real efficiency benefits to be had from reducing manual handling at work, so what are you waiting for?

(If you would like further information ring Jon Allbutt on 01959-575575).



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