

# LIGHTEN THE LOAD

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## Good practice awards

The 'Lighten the load' campaign includes the annual good practice awards to recognise companies and organisations that have made outstanding and innovative contributions to promote an integrated management approach to tackle MSDs, embracing prevention of MSDs, and the retention, rehabilitation and reintegration of workers who already suffer from MSDs.

## How can you get involved?

- Download our campaign support materials from the website.
- Use these materials to develop a strategy to raise awareness of the problem of MSDs and the solutions to eliminate or reduce them. The website contains examples of tried and tested good practice, as well as forums for sharing ideas and finding out what others are doing.
- Get in touch with your national focal point for further information and support.

To find out more about the campaign, visit our 'Lighten the load' campaign website at <http://ew2007.osha.europa.eu>

The site includes:

- multilingual information packs, factsheets and information sheets with handy tips to help you organise and manage activities, and other useful resources;
- ideas for activities and actions during the week;
- good practice case studies;
- links to related sites, plus much more.

## National contact points for your region

For more information and to receive a campaign pack, contact the Agency's focal point in your country.

The contact details are on the Agency website at:  
<http://ew2007.osha.europa.eu/nationalcontacts>

## About the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work acts as a catalyst for developing and disseminating information to improve Europe's occupational safety and health (OSH). By bringing together representatives from governments, employers' and workers' organisations, as well as leading OSH experts in each of the EU-27 Member States and beyond, the Agency provides a reliable, balanced and impartial source of OSH information.

*The European campaign is backed by the EU Presidencies of Germany and Portugal in 2007, by the European Parliament and the European Commission, and by the European social partners.*

More information about the European Agency and the European Week can be found at <http://ew2007.osha.europa.eu>

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A European campaign  
on musculoskeletal disorders

<http://ew2007.osha.europa.eu>



European Agency  
for Safety and Health  
at Work

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## The 'Lighten the load' campaign

The European campaign aims to promote an integrated management approach to tackle musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) embracing prevention of MSDs, and the retention, rehabilitation and reintegration of workers who already suffer from MSDs.

Run by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, the 'Lighten the load' campaign involves employers, workers, workers' safety representatives, practitioners, preventive services, policymakers and other stakeholders in improving MSD prevention at workplace level.

The campaign culminates in the European Week of Safety and Health at Work from 22 to 26 October 2007, and is an opportunity to make Europe's workplaces safer and healthier.

## What are MSDs?

Musculoskeletal disorders cover a broad range of health problems. The main groups are back pain/injuries and work-related upper limb disorders, commonly known as 'repetitive strain injuries', but lower limbs can also be affected.

MSDs are adverse health outcomes — NOT hazards or risks.

Much of the problem can be prevented or reduced by following existing health and safety regulations, and by following the guidance on good practice.

## Why is it an issue?

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are the most common work-related problem in Europe. Almost 24% of the EU-25 workers report suffering from backache and 22% complain about muscular pains. Both conditions are more prevalent in the new Member States, 39% and 36% respectively. (1) Not only do MSDs cause personal suffering and loss of income, but they also generate high costs for businesses and national economies. Any worker can be affected, yet MSDs can be prevented by assessing work tasks, putting in place preventive measures, and checking that these measures stay effective.

MSDs affect millions of European workers across all employment sectors but they are a particular problem in construction, service and retail, education, healthcare, hotels, restaurants and catering.

## What should we do?

What is needed is a holistic approach to MSDs that integrates both primary prevention and the return to work of those who suffer an MSD.

Current thinking on MSDs focuses on the total load on the body and the 'Lighten the load' campaign focuses on 'managing the load'. This not only refers to the load being carried but also includes all the 'strains' being put on the body by, for example, the material being moved, the environmental factors, other hazards such as vibrations, and the pace at which the task is being carried out.

Particular note should be made of the relationship between MSDs and work-related stress.

Normally there is not a single risk factor leading to the development of MSDs. For example, manual handling is not a single cause of back pain; there are many other risk factors contributing to its development such as stress, cold, work organisation, etc. Therefore, it is important to assess the full range of MSD risks and to address them in a comprehensive way.

## Risk prevention, education and awareness

The campaign seeks to promote improved safety and health at the workplace level by involving all relevant stakeholders.

The integrated management approach includes three key elements that are important for its successful implementation:

- employers, employees and government working together to tackle MSDs;
- addressing the whole load on the body leading to MSDs; and
- managing the retention, rehabilitation and return to work of those who suffer, or have suffered, MSDs

## Who can take part?

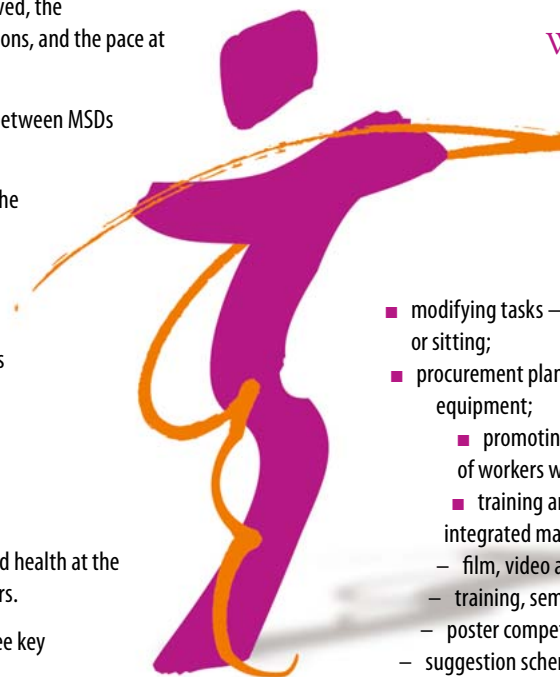
The campaign is open to all organisations and individuals at local, national and European level, including:

- employers — public and private sector — including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);
- managers, supervisors and workers;
- trade unions and safety representatives;
- safety and health institutions;
- occupational safety and health (OSH) professionals and practitioners;
  - training providers and the education community;
  - regional and local OSH prevention and insurance services.

## What can you do?

There are many initiatives and activities. Here are just a few ideas:

- risk assessments — to cover the full range of risks;
- action programmes — to take a holistic approach to the risks causing MSDs;
- modifying tasks — to eliminate or reduce prolonged standing or sitting;
- procurement plans — to provide 'user friendly' machines and equipment;
  - promoting retention, reintegration and rehabilitation of workers who have suffered MSDs;
  - training and information — to form part of an integrated management approach — by using:
    - film, video and multimedia;
    - training, seminars and workshops;
    - poster competitions and quizzes;
    - suggestion schemes;
    - exhibitions and open days;
    - advertising and promotion campaigns;
    - press conferences and media activities.



(1) European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. 4th European Working Conditions Survey, 2005.