

Preventing injury from handling heavy blocks

What you need to know as a busy builder

Fed up of suffering from a bad back or joint pain whilst laying or handling concrete blocks?

These are essential health and safety tips you should follow, even if you don't directly employ the people working on your site.

- Always order the lightest block that meets the design criteria. Where heavier blocks are needed, talk to the designer about other options such as laying blocks flat instead of upright.
- Don't load out blocks by hand. Use machines or mechanical aids. Organise site traffic routes and scaffolding bays to deliver blocks close to where they will be laid.
- Use lightweight foundation (trench) blocks that have handholds and consider using half-size blocks. Widen trenches so blocks can be laid at foot level, not below it.
- Adapt scaffolding and working platforms to allow blocks to be laid between chest and knee height. It places less stress on the body and work rate is faster.

Back pain doesn't just happen at work

Back pain caused by manual handling builds slowly but once developed can greatly affect many aspects of life, such as driving or sports and leisure activities. Take steps to prevent it at all by following this simple guidance.

- Arrange block stacks and spot boards at a comfortable height and position them next to you rather than behind. This avoids unnecessary twisting and stopping.
- Handle blocks close to the body when lifting into position. Arrange block stacks with clear access and small enough to avoid over-reaching. Remember – do not load out by hand.
- Make sure workers are trained to use lifting equipment and handling aids safely.
- Keep stored blocks dry to avoid weight gain from rain.

See overleaf for examples of good practice...

Fee for Intervention

HSE now recovers the costs of time spent dealing with material breaches of health and safety law. This is known as Fee for Intervention (FFI). FFI generally applies when an inspector finds something wrong that they believe is serious enough for them to write to you about. A fee is charged for the time spent by the inspector in sorting it out. Following the simple guidance on this sheet may help you to avoid having to pay a fee.



Always try to lay between shoulder and waist height.

Use staging or adapt work platforms to help.

If laying in red zones, reduce laying rate or consider a half-size block.

Arrange block stacks and spot boards at a comfortable position.



Avoid double handling by carrying from block stacks to the work area.

Use handling equipment to take the blocks to where they are to be laid.

Powered barrows with attachments can take blocks across rough ground.



Always select the lightest block you can that has the required strength.

If using large foundation (trench) blocks, consider units with handholds to help grip.



Site managers should plan for site deliveries and keep routes clear so that packs can be delivered where they are needed.

Always train and involve your workforce. They often have valuable suggestions that may help improve health and safety and efficiency.



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The Working Well Together campaign aims to improve health and safety in the construction industry, particularly in small and micro businesses. For more information visit www.wwt.uk.com



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