

### Manual Handling Guidance

*N Fallentin et al. Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment and Health. Supplement 2 (2001) Vol.27*

The authors have produced a systematic review of guidelines for manual handling at work.

Among their conclusions is that there should be a repetitive work Directive. Such a Directive would establish a standard, which would be applicable to the duty of care. In our view, insurers should involve themselves with the development of such standards as and when they are being created.

Rather than define safe repetitive work quantitatively the authors promote the use of qualitative guidance in the style of the manual handling Directive.

They also promote the use of standards based on detection of incident cases. This is a remarkable turn of events, effectively using workers as canaries. Their argument is that since there are no quantitative standards available from science, it is better to use early signs of harm as indicators of the need to act, than to do nothing at all. Such an approach could be viewed as pragmatic. It could be effective if there was no fear of reporting, and early signs were actually specific.

On a general level, epidemiological evidence indicates a causal relationship between several physical work factors and msd but poor dose response data prevent accurate assignment of thresholds. (not least because the methods of measuring exposure are usually self report or limited in some other way).

Qualitative aspects such as awkward postures, high hand forces, highly repetitive motions, repeated impact, heavy lifting frequent lifting awkward lifting, high exposure to vibration. Are easy to describe but require local, expert assessment if they are to be used productively.

Good process standards must address management commitment, employee involvement, hazard analysis, control advice, training, health surveillance) even though no-one knows which if any of these are important.

The EC Manual handling Directive rates as 'unknown' on the efficacy scale. That is no-one knows if its advice actually works.

#### Comment

Recommendations published in this journal have a habit of appearing in EC Directives.

A Directive on repetitive work would be of interest to duty holders and their insurers. It may be advisable to take part in any discussions/consultations on the subject.