

Everyday activity, unwanted outcome: Poor manual handling leads to back strain

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A member has reported an incident in which a member of the shore staff injured his back due to the incorrect lifting of a heavy box from above head height.

What happened?

The person was working alone in a container unit onshore, searching for a spare part for an engine by individually removing boxes from the shelves to look inside them.

On the top shelf (2m high) there was a box with a turbocharger in it, which weighed approximately 20kg. Although the contents were clearly labelled on the box, the person was not expecting the weight of the box to be that heavy and had not prepared his stance ready to correctly accept the weight.

When the box was removed from the shelf, it fell to waist height; to avoid damaging the equipment he held on tight to it. This caused a jolt and strain to his back. Having hurt his back he continued with light duties for the rest of the day. He had previous experience with back strain and did not require to visit an external medical unit.

Our member noted the following:

- The box was subsequently repositioned on a lower shelf.
- Self-applied haste caused the person to not check the label on the box before lifting it off the shelf. If he had taken the time to read the label he would have been warned to position himself in such a way to be able to accept the heavy load correctly and without injury.
- Heavy items should never be placed on the top shelves; they should always, where possible, be stored at waist height shelves to promote safer manual handling.

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