

TOOLBOX TALK: BACK SAFETY AND LIFTING

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Think about the last time your back went. Was it something huge, or was it a sheet of plywood you picked up sideways because you were nearly done?

The talk

The spine handles compression well and handles twisting under load badly. Almost every serious back injury in this trade involves a twist, a reach, or a load held away from the body, not simply weight.

Distance is the multiplier nobody feels. A load held at arm's length puts several times more force through the lower back than the same load held against your body. That is why a light awkward object hurts people more often than a heavy compact one.

So the plan is the lift. Where is it going, is the path clear, is there a door to open, is there something to set it down on halfway. Most injuries happen in the part of the lift people never planned, which is the setting down.

The mechanics: feet apart and stable, get close, bend the knees and hips not the back, grip it firmly, lift smoothly with the legs, keep it against your body, and turn with your feet instead of twisting your spine. Set it down the same way you picked it up.

Above shoulder height and below knee height are the two danger zones. Anything stored above shoulder height should come down with a ladder or a second person. Anything on the floor should be raised to waist height before you carry it if there is any way to do it.

And the two things that actually remove the risk: get help, or use equipment. A dolly, a cart, a panel carrier, a lifting strap, a second person. There is no prize for carrying a tub of thinset alone, and a team lift only works if one person calls the count.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The heaviest and most awkward thing anybody is moving today
- The path it takes, including doors, stairs, cords and the ground outside
- The carts, dollies and panel carriers on site, and whether they are being used

- Anything stored above shoulder height that has to come down
- Where material can be staged closer to where it is being used
- Who is pairing up on the awkward lifts and who is calling the count

The rules that apply

- Plan the lift before you touch it: route, destination, obstacles, and where you set it down.
- Keep the load close to your body. Distance from the spine multiplies the force far faster than weight does.
- Lift with the legs, keep the back in its natural curve, and turn with your feet rather than twisting under load.
- Get help or use equipment for anything heavy, awkward, oversized or above shoulder height.
- On a team lift, one person calls the lift, the carry and the set down.
- Stage material close to the work and off the floor so the same items are not handled five times.

Ask the crew

- What is the worst lift on this job today, and how are we doing it?
- Who has hurt their back on a job, and what were they doing when it happened?
- What could we stage closer to the work so nobody has to carry it twice?

Close with this

Plan it, keep it close, turn with your feet, and ask for help before you find out you needed it.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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This talk is general safety information for a crew briefing, not legal advice and not a substitute for the training your employees are required to have. Standards are quoted for orientation only. Check the current text of the standard and your own state plan, which may be stricter than the federal rule.