

Ergonomic Guidelines for Laundry Workers, Supervisors and Managers

This OSACH Fast Fact is intended to promote discussion among workers and between workers and supervisors, and to guide managers making planning and budgeting decisions.

If you work in a laundry, you probably know about heavy loads, sore feet, eyestrain, heat stress, potentially infectious materials and repetitive strain injury. Some changes in your workplace can help to reduce these problems. Talk to your colleagues and supervisor about some of the possible changes discussed below.

Avoiding Heat Stress

- Equip the laundry with air conditioning to avoid heat stress during the summer.
- If air conditioning is not possible or is not adequate to prevent heat stress, schedule work and rest periods to eliminate the problem.
- Provide water fountains.
- Learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of heat stress to ensure that anyone who is affected receives prompt treatment.

Making Lighting Work for You

- Make sure that the lighting for detailed visual work (e.g., mending) is adequate. Use “task lighting” (e.g., table or floor lamp) to increase the amount of light.
- Position your work and the task lighting to eliminate glare (light shining into your eyes).

Reducing the Risk of Lifting Injuries

Eliminate or reduce the need to lift, lower, carry or otherwise handle heavy bags of soiled laundry by:

- > using mechanical aids such as carts and slings
- > minimizing the distance the load is carried
- > keeping loads at hip height
- > arranging work tasks and physical layout to minimize the number of times the load is lifted or carried
- > using spring-loaded inserts for laundry carts to keep the laundry at hip height
- Use machines that tilt to empty loads from the washer and dryer. If your machines do not have this feature, use inexpensive reaching aids such as a homemade “clothes rake.”
- Ensure that large bags of soiled laundry are not more than two thirds full. Use smaller bags to ensure that they will not be too heavy.
- Test the weight of the laundry bag before you attempt to lift it.

Other Ways to Reduce Physical Demands

- Change your working posture and tasks frequently throughout the workday. For example:
 - > rotate among tasks that use different muscle groups (after sorting or folding for a while, do something that requires less arm and hand work)
 - > alternate between tasks you can do while sitting and those that you do while standing
 - > increase the variety of tasks in your job
- Avoid working to one side. If you must face one side, alternate positions to use the muscles on both sides. It is least stressful to work when you are upright and your activities are directly in front of your body.
- Make sure you can safely handle the carts you use to deliver clean clothes. If a cart is too big to see around or too heavy for one person, make sure two people are available (one to push and the other to pull and guide).
- Use an ergonomically designed chair for seated workstations (e.g., for sewing, mending and marking). An ergonomic chair should support the back and have adjustable features to fit people of different sizes. Ergonomic chairs vary greatly in cost and features. Try out different chairs for different workstations and people before purchasing.
- Avoid frequent forward bending in your work by:
 - > having working levels at or just below elbow height (working level refers to the height of the work surface plus the height of the work)
 - > having work surfaces that are adjustable in height
- On laundry bags, use lock sliders that are released by pressure from your whole hand, not by pinching with your thumb and forefinger.
- If the height of your work surface can not be adjusted, set the level for a tall person and use a safe platform to raise shorter workers.
- When you wear gloves, choose a pair that fits you well. Your hands become tired faster when your gloves are too large.

Coping When Standing a Lot

- Use a sit-stand stool at standing workstations (e.g., the folding table) to take some weight off your feet.
- Raise one leg and place one foot on a foot stool or foot rail while standing.
- Place anti-fatigue matting at workstations where people have to stand for long periods of time.
- Wear anti-fatigue shoe insoles if standing or walking a lot.