Leadership in major contractors: Preventing sprain and strain injuries
Deidre Rutherford
Department of Justice and Attorney-General, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, Australia

1. Introduction
Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) caused by the performance of hazardous manual tasks (HMT) continue to be a significant issue for the construction industry. This a priority focus for Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ). MSD account for approximately 46 per cent of the total workers’ compensation claims costs for the Queensland construction industry (financial year 2011-2012). Fifty four percent of these MSD claims were caused by HMT.

Effective management of HMT in the construction industry needs strong leadership and management commitment. This includes leaders facilitating co-operation and consultation between all the parties in the construction process (principal contractors, client, designers, manufacturers, suppliers, sub-contractors, workers and others). Principal contractors have a critical role in eliminating or minimising the HMT risks at construction workplaces, with the ability to influence the planning, design and work processes to eliminate or minimise the manual tasks risks on site. Control of the risks is best achieved when it occurs from the start of the planning and design stage and continues for the life cycle of the project. By drawing on the knowledge and experience of all involved, more informed decisions can be made to eliminate or minimise HMT risks.

Principal contractors have extensive health and safety management processes which involve rigorous internal and external auditing requirements. Their safety management system may not however, be sufficiently hazard sensitive to ensure effective control of manual tasks risks and a sustained health and safety performance. Furthermore, those who have a position that has an important and ongoing safety leadership role may not have the requisite safety leadership competencies including competency in HMT risk management.

The construction industry faces a number of issues and challenges that impact on work health and safety. This includes: non recognition of musculoskeletal disorders; psychosocial risk factors; an aging and diverse workforce and obesity. Gaps in principal contractor risk management systems, the consultation process and the effective control of HMT risks were identified during industry consultation and previous state wide WHSQ campaigns. These findings led to this intervention focusing on:

- HMT risk management systems
- the role principal contractor leadership plays in managing hazardous manual tasks at construction worksites
- ongoing industry engagement, and
- the development of specific guidance for construction HMT risk management.

2. Aim
The purpose of this intervention is to improve control of HMT risks at construction workplaces through principal contractor leadership and management commitment to HMT risk management.

3. Objective
The intervention objectives are to:

- assess how HMT are systematically managed by the principal contractor
- benchmark current industry practice
- provide guidance about HMT risk management principles and practices
- assist senior managers to identify leadership opportunities to improve HMT risk management
- advise on and encourage a systematic approach to managing HMT risks
- evaluate the audit data and share findings with industry

4. Method
WHSQ is conducting an advisory intervention that assesses leadership practices in the management of HMT in construction organisations. Participants include major contractors in both commercial and civil construction sectors with projects to the value of $100 million. The intervention consists of 4 phases.
Table 1. Intervention

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<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Industry information sessions</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>HMT risk management systems assessment of the principal contractor Site verification of the above systems assessment with subcontractors Management meeting to discuss findings</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Industry forum to present intervention findings</td>
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Two assessment tools were designed to provide HMT specific gap analysis.
- Construction HMT risk management desktop assessment tool
- Construction HMT site verification assessment tool

These tools were developed with industry consultation. They provide best practice guidance and examples. The assessment process will explore current industry practice and case studies as well as identifying opportunities for improvement.

5. Discussion

Phase 1 has been completed and phase 2 of this campaign is currently underway. To date there has been strong industry interest and cooperation about the campaign. Data collection and data analysis is planned to be completed by end June 2015. Phase 4 will include an industry forum to present the campaign findings and seek industry feedback. This paper will expand on these findings, benchmarking results, case studies, recommendations and lessons learnt.

References

Guide to Best Practice for Safer Construction CRC Construction Innovation online resource.
Preconditioning for success. Characteristics and factors ensuring a safe build for the Olympic Park Health and Safety Executive (HSE) online resource.
Model Client Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner, online resource.