

Safety Alert

Finger fractured during manual handling

An operative suffered a crushing injury and multiples fracture to one his fingertips after a heavy duty manhole cover and frame was inadvertently dropped. The operative was involved in a cover replacement team as part of a Utility infrastructure R&M contract who were unloading the cover and frame by hand from the load bed of a 7.5t tipper lorry on which it had been transported to site.

The cover and frame weighed just over 80kg and was one of two similarly sized units that were stacked one on top of the other on the lorry. The IP and one of his colleagues were attempting to move the topmost cover and frame and lift it off the lorry as a two-man lift. As it was slid and approached the edge of the cover underneath, the back edge of the cover dropped suddenly causing the IP to momentarily trap the tip of his right middle finger between it and the lorry bed. The IP was wearing rubberised 'grip' gloves at the time of the accident.

The IP reported to A&E to have the injury assessed and x-rayed, and was subsequently signed off from normal duties for a period of 5 weeks. The IP had received manual handling awareness training during 2006 & 2011.



What went wrong?

Due to inattention or lack of co-ordination, the cover and frame was dropped during the operation to lift it off the lorry. There was no mechanical equipment available to avoid the need for manual handling due to traffic management restrictions at the workplace.

Had the cover leaves been removed from the frame, and each part moved separately, the weight to be could have been significantly reduced; or, had suitable timber spacers been provided on which to set down the cover to move it in stages to the side of the lorry, the incident could have been avoided.

Action to ensure safe working

- Ensure information about the weight of materials to be moved and lifted by hand is available to aid effective planning.
- Plan to have mechanical lifting aids to minimise the risk of heavy manual lifting where possible.
- Ensure all two or multiple person lifting operations are properly co-ordinated, and if necessary undertake a 'trial run' to identify the possible risks and pitfalls before proceeding.
- Split the load into smaller less heavy component parts where possible; many heavy or bulky items need to be disassembled in order for them to be set or fixed into their final positions, so breaking them down first creates minimal disruption.

Additional guidance

The HSE have published a number of manual handling guidance and information leaflets including Indg143 'Getting to grips with manual handling', Indg 383 'Manual handling assessment charts', with associated worksheets.