



Handling Heavy Building Blocks

Construction Industry Advisory Committee Construction Sheet No. 37

This guidance by the Construction Industry Advisory Committee (CONIAC) covers the safe handling of building blocks, by which the committee means all masonry units and blocks including those made of clay, concrete, reconstituted stone, or any similar man-made or natural material.

Handling of heavy building blocks can give rise to a wide range of injuries, including serious injuries where the damage is gradual and progressive over a substantial period of time.

To reduce the risk of injury the blockwork design, site conditions and the way the work is organised should be properly planned. This guidance contains practical advice on these matters and should help designers and specifiers, those managing work on site and those who handle blocks.

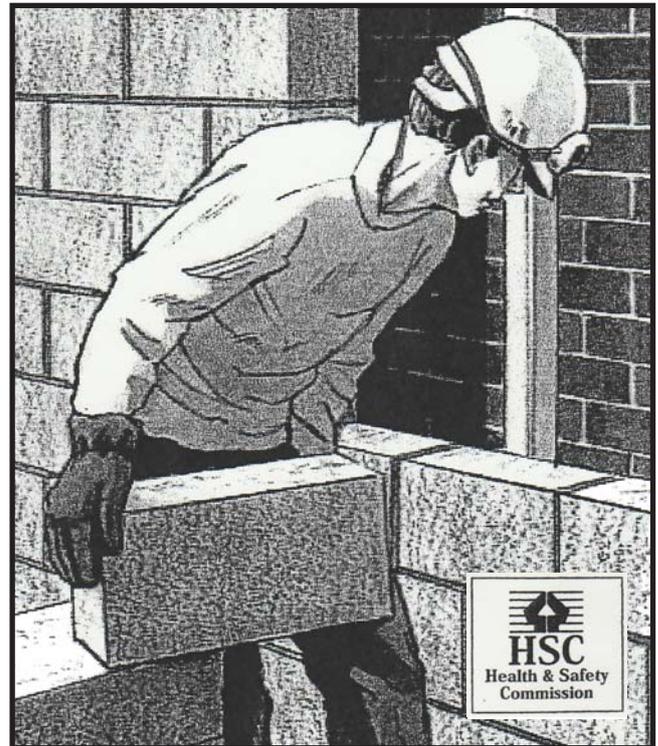
Risk assessment

1. To minimise the risk of injury:

- (a) all the hazards involved need to be identified;
- (b) the significant risks estimated; and
- (c) suitable precautions to avoid or reduce these risks incorporated into a safe system of work.

2 The main hazards are:

- (a) **heavy loads and poor posture:** excessive stress and strain causing injury to muscles and tendons, particularly where handling involves bending, twisting or other difficult postures;
- (b) **slips, trips and falls:** including damage caused by 'dropped blocks';
- (c) **sharp edges:** cuts and abrasions to the skin;
- (d) **skin hazards:** dermatitis, burns and similar conditions caused by contact with mortar (see HSE construction information sheet No 26 Cement).



- 3 With block handling, the risk of injury is largely determined by the weight of the block - the heavier the block, the higher the risk of injury.
- 4 After taking account of expert opinion and the long history of complaints over handling heavy blocks, **CONIAC has concluded that there is a high risk of injury in the single-handed, repetitive manual handling of blocks heavier than 20 kg (44 lbs).**
- 5 If single person handling is needed, either blocks of 20 kg or lighter should be specified and used or other precautions should be taken to reduce the risk by for example, the provision of mechanical handling. This would contribute to the risk assessment required under the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992.
- 6 With blocks weighing less than 20 kg, manual handling risks are still significant and suitable precautions should be taken to minimise these risks as much as possible.