



A sheet lifter is a simple and economical solution to the problem of placing and fixing ceiling plasterboard.

Workers

- ✓ Follow safe work procedures.
- ✓ Use equipment and tools that reduce the manual handling risks. If the sheets have to be handled manually, ensure there are enough workers to assist and that workers have completed training in team handling (team handling is the least preferred option as workers are still exposed to high force and awkward postures).

Suppliers

- ✓ Conduct a pre-delivery screening and/or site inspection to ensure there is unobstructed access for the delivery vehicle and for unloading plasterboard at the site.
- ✓ Use mechanical aids and assistive devices to unload vehicles (e.g. vehicle loading cranes and telehandlers). If mechanical aids can not be used and the sheets have to be handled manually, ensure there are enough workers to assist and that workers have completed training in team handling (team handling is the least preferred option as the workers are still exposed to high forces and awkward postures).

Working together

Under the work health and safety legislation, there are specific duties to ensure effective consultation between builders, workers and contractors.

The most effective way to manage hazardous manual tasks is for the client, designers, manufacturers, suppliers, builders, sub contractors and workers to work together.

Hazardous manual tasks are often the result of the design of the building, work processes and the materials and equipment used. By drawing on the knowledge and experience of all involved, more informed decisions can be made about how the building and materials can be designed to eliminate or minimise hazardous manual task risks.

Designers and builders should identify and manage the risks associated with plasterboard, such as the:

- size, weight and amount of plasterboard required
- design of the building in relation to the ease of plasterboard handling and installation.

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Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Preventing injuries while handling plasterboard

For residential and commercial builders, plasterers, workers and suppliers

Handling plasterboard

Lifting and carrying plasterboard sheets can require construction workers to exert significant force in awkward postures. These hazardous manual tasks can result in serious injuries such as sprains, strains and permanent spine damage, which can have ongoing personal and financial costs to both workers and businesses.

Injuries can be avoided by following a step by step risk management process. A risk management process is a systematic way of making a workplace as safe as possible.

This brochure outlines best practice for handling plasterboard.

A mechanical lifting device such as a telehandler is a good option to consider where access is difficult and a vehicle loading crane cannot be used.



The law

Risk management processes should comply with the [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#) (WHS Act) and the [Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011](#) (part 4.2, section 60, Hazardous manual tasks).

General guidance on the risk management process is available in the [Hazardous Manual Tasks Code of Practice](#) and the [How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks Code of Practice](#).

Residential and commercial builders

Builders play an important role in eliminating or minimising the manual tasks risks associated with handling plasterboard.

- ✓ Consult with everyone involved in the handling of plasterboard. Under the WHS Act, there are specific duties to ensure effective consultation with workers and contractors. Consultation provides all parties with relevant safety information and gives them an opportunity to express their views, raise WHS matters and contribute to decision making. The benefits of involving workers in problem solving WHS issues may include improved productivity, development and ownership of more effective controls, and an improved safety culture.
- ✓ Develop and implement safe work procedures for handling plasterboard. The procedures should be task specific, include information about all the possible risks, provide instructions for how plasterboard is to be handled, and specify what safety controls have been put in place and why.
- ✓ Ensure the site is ready for the delivery and that there is unobstructed access to delivery areas for vehicles and unloading plasterboard.
- ✓ Ensure there is a safe area for unloading plasterboard and other materials. Delivering plasterboard to upstairs locations requires careful planning to determine the best way to reduce manually handling the plasterboard within buildings.
- ✓ Ensure clear access is provided for moving plasterboard and equipment within buildings.
- ✓ Plan and coordinate the delivery of materials with suppliers and tradespeople, and communicate the delivery arrangements to everyone involved. This will avoid congestion of tradespeople and materials.

- ✓ Provide mechanical aids and assistive devices (e.g. trolleys and electronic pallet jacks) for moving plasterboard to the storage area and around the site.
- ✓ Store loads as close to the point of use as possible.
- ✓ Store plasterboard sheets in a way that reduces the manual task and falling risks. Consider alternate methods, for example, storing sheets close to vertical in a cradle or racking system which is suitably designed, restrained and secured. If sheets are stored close to vertical, the rack needs to be designed so that the sheets cannot fall on workers (ie the rack allows the sheets to lean on an angle or there is a physical restraint to prevent sheets falling over). If sheets are stored horizontally, can they be raised off the ground to reduce manual handling below knee height?
- ✓ Ensure that the weight of the load is within the point load limits and the load is secured.

Plasterers

- ✓ When purchasing plasterboard, plan and communicate with the builder about how the plasterboard will be handled.
- ✓ Provide and use equipment and tools that reduce manual handling risks (e.g. sheet lifters, plasterboard ceiling props, trolleys, work platforms and grip devices).
- ✓ Keep pathways and the work area clear to manoeuvre equipment or manually handle sheets.
- ✓ If sheets have to be handled manually, ensure there are enough workers to assist and that workers have completed training in team handling (team handling is the least preferred option as workers are still exposed to high force and awkward postures).