

Ask The Expert: When Newly Installed Equipment Poses Ergonomic Hazards



QUESTION

We recently brought in bear-proof garbage bins about 4-feet-tall with heavy lids that open only about 45°. It now takes 2 workers to dump the garbage—one to hold open the lid and the other to throw the garbage bags in the bin. This causes overexertion, especially to the worker who has to pry and hold open the heavy lid and several complaints have been received. But management says the bins are here to stay. Please advise.

ANSWER

As with many hazards, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) require a hierarchy of controls approach:

Step 1: Consider Substitution. Get rid of the bins and substitute ergonomically safer equipment if it's reasonably practicable.

Step 2: If substitution isn't reasonably practicable, consider engineering controls or equipment to eliminate the need to do the operation manually, e.g., mechanized lifting equipment, or adapt the load to facilitate the lid lifting and dumping.

Step 3: If engineering controls aren't reasonably practicable

(and/or as a supplement to engineering controls), implement work controls, including training, safe lifting procedures, etc.

Step 4: Documents your consideration of substitution and engineering controls, why you concluded they weren't reasonably practicable and why you considered the alternative measures as providing equivalent protection. **Bottom Line:** It's OK to take cost and feasibility into account; what's NOT OK is failing to at least consider the substitution and engineering controls options.