preventing injuries in bakeries

Staff in bakeries face many hazards in their work environment. Hazards have the potential for causing injury or illness. To prevent injuries you should adopt a risk management approach to hazards in your workplace.

what is risk management?

A risk management approach has the following steps:

1. Look for hazards and risks in the workplace.
2. Determine how dangerous the hazard is.
3. Find ways to remove or minimise the danger.
4. Check step 3 worked!

look for hazards and risks in the workplace

There are many ways to identify hazards:

- Look at the work environment. Do you see crates stacked head high, 25kg bags of flour on the floor, wet or greasy floors, hot objects… Of course you do, it is a bakery! Yet these items constitute a risk to the safety of your workers.
- Look at how your staff do their jobs. Are they lifting heavy weights from awkward positions, doing the same action over and over, bending a part of their body for prolonged periods, using ovens without protective gloves? These work practices also constitute a risk to the safety of your workers.
- If you have an injury or near miss, this will also tell you where hazards may be found.
- Learn from others. Read about incidents in your industry and Occupational Health and Safety. Regularly check your industry newsletter or website. Listen to the news.

determine how dangerous the hazard is

To determine how dangerous the hazard is, ask yourself:

> **How likely is it to happen** – how many workers are in the area or handle the equipment etc or how often is the task undertaken? **AND**

> **How bad will the injury be if it does happen?**

For example, how often do your staff lift 25kg bags of ingredients? If the answer is "often", you may have a problem. If lifting a 25kg bag was to cause an injury, how bad would it be? It is likely your employee would suffer a back strain which would require treatment and time off work. This constitutes a medium to high risk.

Another example, how often do your staff enter a walk-in oven? Does the oven have a release mechanism from inside? What is the chance of your employee being locked in your oven? Really, it is not likely to happen very often. But, if it was to happen, what would be the result? Unfortunately it has happened and the result of a person being locked in an oven that is baking is death. Therefore, this constitutes a high risk.

find ways to remove or minimise the danger

Wherever possible, aim to eliminate the hazard all together.

If this is not possible, work through the other options. Try not to go straight to the personal protection option as this is usually least effective in the long term. If you can't eliminate, **you will often need to use more than one approach to best control the risk.**

For example in relation to handling the 25kg flour bags this is done by:

1. Elimination eg pump all ingredients directly to mixer

2. Substitution eg use smaller bags of ingredients

3. Engineering eg use trolleys and mechanical lifting devices

4. Administration eg write a safe work procedure for using 25kg bags of ingredients including points such as the need for a team lift or storage above ground level

5. Personal protection eg give your employees backbelts!

check step 3 worked!

You should always check that your control has worked. Sometimes it may have fixed one problem, only to cause another, eg moving crates to decrease manual handling may have created a trip hazard.

typical risks and controls in the baking industry

Below are typical risks found in the baking industry and some suggestions to control them. Remember, you may need to use more than one control and you need to check your strategy has worked!

risks	managing the risks
slips, trips & falls cause fractures, bruising, sprains & strains	> Provide non slip floors & anti-fatigue mats > Purchase liquids in smaller containers with secure lids to minimise potential for spills > Clean up spills promptly > Display warning signs when floors are slippery or wet > Wear non slip footwear > Use safety steps to access high shelves > Ensure that all walkways are kept free of materials or equipment
manual handling causes hernias, musculoskeletal injuries, sprains & strains	> Purchase products in smaller quantities e.g. under 16 kilograms or litres > Provide bins on wheels > Store frequently used goods between hip and shoulder height wherever possible > Avoid placing heavier items on the floor or above shoulder height > Provide equipment such as trolleys, vacuum lifts etc > Provide training to staff in safe lifting techniques > Promote team lifts
ergonomic overuse causes injuries, sprains & strains	> Have different height benches to match the height to the individual > Ensure that regularly used items are stored close to the worker > Provide long handled cleaning tools to prevent stooping > Provide free standing benches so staff can move to the other side rather than reaching across > Introduce staff rotation to allow staff to vary their work tasks & change their work posture > Multi-skill staff so that tasks can be rotated > Encourage staff to take short rest breaks when appropriate during work cycle > Choose hand tools with ergonomic handles
plant & machinery causes crush injuries, fractures, amputations, cuts, sprains & strains	> Provide adequate space around machinery > Ensure that all machines are guarded, interlocks are working, & machinery can be isolated > Program regular maintenance > Provide safe work procedures on how to use the machinery correctly > Provide training to staff on procedures > Ensure cold rooms and walk-in ovens can be opened from inside & have alarms installed
hazardous substances cause acute & chronic health problems	> Choose less toxic products > Store products in original packaging > Utilise chemical dispensing units to avoid need for decanting etc > Provide Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for staff to read. Store MSDS near chemicals and/or first aid kit > Provide protective equipment e.g. gloves, aprons, masks as necessary
hot objects cause burns & scalds, superficial & deep	> Provide oven mitts & gloves for handling trays, pots and trolleys > Ensure staff wear protective clothing e.g. long trousers & covered in shoes > Avoid carrying hot ingredients about the work area by keeping hot work in one area > Provide physical barrier to avoid working too close to hot oil > All walk in ovens must be able to be opened from the inside and have alarms installed
irritants cause health problems, eg dermatitis and asthma	> Identify all sources of dust in the production cycle & minimise exposure by minimising storage of flour in work area, providing enclosed mixing systems & adequate ventilation > Provide dust masks > Avoid dry sweeping floors. Use vacuum cleaning or wet cleaning methods. > Regularly monitor health of workers > Provide gentle hand cleaning products > Wear vinyl gloves

getting injured workers back to work

Your encouragement and assistance can make the difference in getting an injured worker back to work. It's a win-win situation. You benefit from having a productive worker back at work and reducing the cost of your workers compensation premium. Your worker benefits by getting fit at work and maintaining their income. In fact, studies have shown workers who return to work sooner are less likely to suffer long-term persistent pain.

You can help your worker by:

- Talking with the worker about how the injury occurred and how it can be prevented in future.
- Letting the worker know that you are keen for them to return to work when the doctor says they are fit for suitable duties.
- Seeking advice from your workers compensation insurer regarding assisting the worker to return to work as soon as possible.
- Providing a copy of the injured worker's role from this job dictionary to the doctor, physiotherapist and occupational therapist. This will help treatment providers identify the work demands of the job and develop a work related activity program for the worker.
- Reviewing your work environment. Are there hazards which are stopping your worker coming back to work? Can the work environment be modified to assist the worker perform their normal duties?
- Providing suitable duties for the worker while they are temporarily unable to perform their normal duties. Suitable duties may include:
  - reduced working hours at the beginning and gradually increasing the hours until the worker reaches their normal work hours,
  - different starting and finishing times to allow the worker to go to physiotherapy or participate in an exercise program,
  - modified work duties, equipment or tools to help them perform their duties, such as placing bowls on trolleys to raise the height or using smaller bags of ingredients,
  - selecting tasks from the job dictionary within medical restrictions, or
  - changes to the work environment, such as raising or lowering bench height.

For examples of how to use suitable duties see return-to-work case studies on the Baking Industry Association NSW website, www.biansw.com.au.