How to Handle Handcarts Safely

WHAT’S AT STAKE?
It’s a rare workplace that doesn’t have some sort of handcart for moving stock and equipment. From wheelbarrows and furniture carts to dollies and pallet jacks, handcarts help do a job better and faster, and they help to prevent back injuries caused by lifting heavy items.

WHAT’S THE DANGER?
Compared to a piece of heavy equipment, a handcart doesn’t seem like one of the big dangers of the workplace. But anyone who has ever operated one for any length of time will tell you there are a surprising number of ways to be injured. Hazards include:
- Struck by falling loads.
- Back strain if you move the handcart the wrong way or lift materials incorrectly.
- Cuts and pinch points.
- Foot injuries from hand trucks running over your foot.
- Injuries caused when an operator loses control of the handcart on an incline.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF
9 Easy Ways to Safely Operate a Handcart
1. Inspect to Protect
   - Is it in good mechanical condition overall?
   - Are the brakes working?
   - Tag and place faulty equipment out of service.
2. Safe Stack
   - Keep the center of gravity low by putting heavier objects on the bottom.
   - Use strapping to hold a load in place.
   - Keep load height low enough so you have a clear view ahead.
   - Don’t exceed the weight capacity.
3. Pay Attention!
   - Keep your feet clear of the wheels, even when loading.
   - Stay alert to pinch point hazards to prevent injuries to your hands.
   - Stick to designated traffic lanes, and stop and look at intersections.
4. Riding Not Allowed
   - Don’t ride on a cart made for a walking operator.
   - Never carry passengers.
5. Push It!
   - Unless the cart is designed for pulling, push it.
   - It’s easier on your back!
6. Loading and Unloading
   - Bend your knees instead of your back.
   - Don’t pick up more than you can easily handle.
7. Smooth Operator
   - Keep the handcart ahead of you when going down a hill.
   - Stay away from the edges of loading docks or other platforms.
   - Make sure the dock plate and landing strip are wide enough to accommodate the cart’s wheels.
8. PPE Please
   - Wear your PPE—gloves and safety shoes, and other PPE required to protect against the material being handled and other hazards.
9. Free Parking
   - Park and store handcarts where they will not create tripping hazards.
   - Don’t block exits or emergency equipment such as fire extinguishers.

FINAL WORD
Just as its name implies, a handcart is a handy piece of equipment. Following a few simple tips can help you use them safely.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE
1. Pulling a handcart is easier on your back than pushing it.
   □ True □ False
2. Don’t block exits or emergency equipment when parking the handcart.
   □ True □ False
3. Keep the center of gravity low by putting heavier objects on the top.
   □ True □ False
4. Keep the handcart ahead of you when going down a hill.
   □ True □ False

What Would You Do?
Bill, your co-worker, likes to get the job done quickly and efficiently, particularly when using a handcart to unload a trailer. He stacks heavy boxes so high that he can’t see where he is going and the other day he nearly ran into one of the office workers. What would you do?