

# Hints on Occupational Health for Couriers

## Manual Delivery Operations



Occupational Safety and Health Branch  
Labour Department

This booklet is prepared by  
the Occupational Safety and Health Branch  
Labour Department

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This edition    August 2010

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# **Hints on Occupational Health for Couriers**

## **Manual Delivery Operations**

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## The story begins .....

Kenny and Nancy were neighbours. They are couriers of different express delivery companies. One day, they met in a commercial building on their way of delivery.

Kenny: Hello, Nancy. What a surprise to see you!

Nancy: Hello, Kenny. Nice to see you!



Kenny: You look tired. How are you getting on lately?

Nancy: My back has been painful recently and my arms and legs are tired. Don't know what's wrong.

Nancy: These are disturbing. Sometimes I can't sleep well at night.



Kenny: As couriers, we often have to carry lots of goods to different places. We walk much more than other people do. If we don't take care, our muscles and tendons could get hurt easily.

Nancy: You look happy with this job and seem to have your ways of doing the job. Would you mind sharing?

Kenny: Not really. However, my company has adopted some practices to protect our health and reduce our risk of getting musculoskeletal problems.

Nancy: Really? What are they?

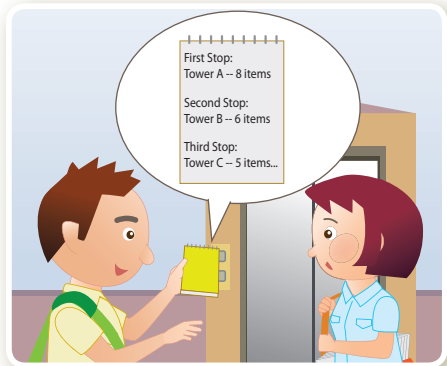




Kenny: My company provides sufficient manpower to handle delivery items having regard to the characteristics of the service in each district, such as the quantity and weight of the items, ease of delivery and environmental conditions of the district, etc. If the situation warrants, more staff will be deployed to districts where assistance is required.

Kenny: The company also advises us to carefully plan an appropriate delivery route after we receive the assigned items.

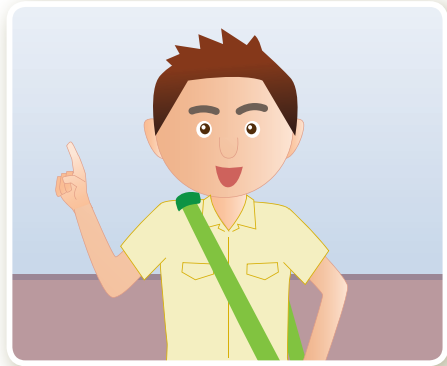
Nancy: Delivery route? Is it not travelling from near to far, or vice versa, and avoiding taking the same way back?



Kenny: That's right. One of the considerations is to avoid unnecessary trips. Besides, in selecting a delivery route, we should make good use of transport facilities whenever possible.



Kenny: Preferably, start with districts where many items have to be delivered, and that are directly accessible by transport and within a short walking distance. Leave those districts where lengthy walking is required to the last, if possible.



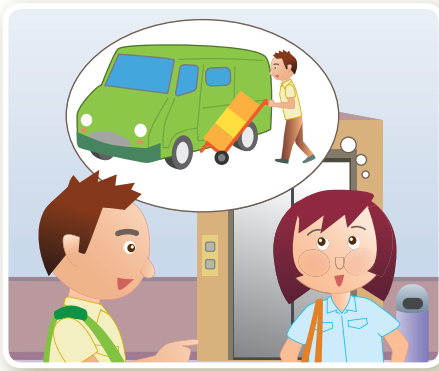
Kenny: In this way, the load in your back bag can be reduced quickly, and you won't have to walk to remote districts carrying lots of items, thereby could walk at a leisure pace.

Nancy: I see. Why haven't I thought of this before?

Kenny: The mailbag provided by the company is also significant. It must not be oversized. It will otherwise be easily overloaded with too many items, making it heavy and bulky to carry.

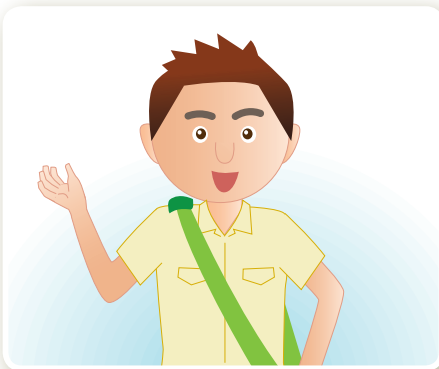






Kenny: Large delivery items should be handled separately from letters. My company will use a van to take bulky items to the vicinity of the delivery destination. We will then use a trolley to deliver the items to the clients.

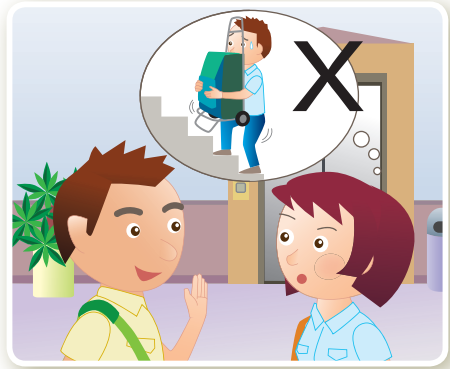
Kenny: As for letters, if too many letters have to be despatched, we will use a wheeled bag.



Kenny: Note that trolleys or wheeled bags with bigger wheels move more smoothly and are easier to pull. My company not only provides plenty of these trolleys and wheeled bags for us to use, but encourages us to utilise them so as to reduce exertion injuries.

Nancy: There are lots of staircases in the district I serve. It's not that convenient for me to use wheeled bags.

Kenny: If you have to carry a big and heavy wheeled bag upstairs and downstairs frequently, it's really inconvenient and even dangerous.



Kenny: Therefore, I always take a lift where one is available when I carry a wheeled bag, even though I may need to walk a bit more. At least, I don't have to carry the wheeled bag upstairs and downstairs.

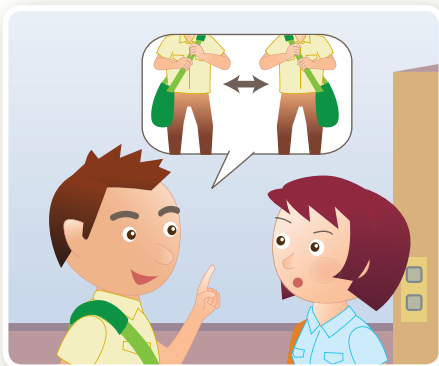
Kenny: However, if certain areas do not have any lift facilities, we should inform the company to make special arrangements for such routes, such as flexibly deploying staff to provide assistance to colleagues in these areas so that less letters will be assigned to them. In this case, no wheeled bags will be required, and it will not be necessary to carry a wheeled bag upstairs and downstairs.





Kenny: Moreover, it is best to use knapsacks as mailbags because the weight of the bag can be spread evenly over both shoulders.

Kenny: However, if this is not possible and cross-body bags have to be used, choose the type with a wider shoulder strap and a soft shoulder pad so that the weight of the bag on the shoulder can be spread out widely.



Kenny: We should carry a cross-body bag with the right and left shoulders alternately. Do not carry the bag on the same shoulder all the time.

Kenny: Besides, use a cross-body bag with a shoulder strap of proper length to keep the bag at about the waist position, and carry it across the body so that it won't slip over the shoulder.



Kenny: I'm going up to the 28th floor, and you?

Nancy: 35th floor, please.

Kenny: One more thing. On the way of delivery, we should make good use of the time while on board a vehicle or the waiting time to get some rest. For instance, we can put down the mailbag and rest for a while when commuting or waiting for the recipient.





Kenny: In our free time, we can also do some stretching exercises to increase the flexibility of our joints and strengthen our muscles.

Kenny: My company has got some DVDs about stretching exercises from the Labour Department, and they are pretty good. Here's one for you. Take your time to watch it.

Nancy: Thank you. Are there other things I need to note?



Kenny: As couriers, we often have to deliver mails on foot, which may increase the pressure on the sole and hence result in plantar fasciitis. Therefore, we should choose comfortable and lightweight footwear, such as those with soft soles and good shock absorption.

Nancy: Yes. We can also put insoles into shoes to reduce pressure on the sole.

Kenny: What is more, it is hot and humid in summer. As we have to walk to different places to make deliveries, remember to take precautionary measures to prevent heat stroke. For example, arrange work to be done in cooler periods of the day as far as possible, and take covered or shaded routes.

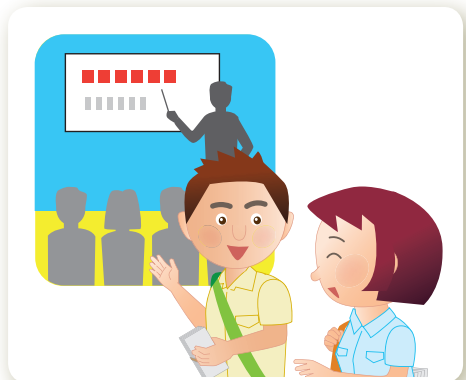


Kenny: And carry adequate potable water and a wide-brimmed hat, as well as wear loose-fitting clothing made of natural materials. Don't forget to drink more water to make up for the loss from the body and to take breaks regularly.

Nancy: Your tips are very practical, Kenny. Where did you learn them?

Kenny: I learnt them from the occupational safety and health training course provided by my company.

Nancy: Your company does care about the occupational safety and health of its couriers.





Kenny: Yes, it is. The Labour Department also offers occupational health talks to the public, and provides plenty of safety and health information, which are all free.

Nancy: I'll check out their website for suitable talks, and get some relevant information for reference, too.

Kenny: The Department has also set up a hotline. If you feel that the workplace or practice is unsafe, you can seek assistance by calling this hotline.



Kenny: I have to leave now. See you later.

Nancy: Thank you for your tips. I'll buy you a drink next time. Goodbye.

Finally, let me summarize some important points for you:

- Provide sufficient manpower for the delivery by appropriate allocation of tasks.
- Plan the delivery route carefully and make good use of transport facilities to reduce physical exertion at work.
- Select a suitable mailbag and use mechanical aids, such as a trolley, to handle large items.
- Do not overload a mailbag with too many items. It is better to carry a cross-body mailbag with the right and left shoulders alternately.
- Put down the mailbag and take a rest while on board a vehicle or waiting for clients.
- Wear comfortable and lightweight shoes.
- Do some stretching exercises in your free time.
- Take suitable precautionary measures to prevent heat stroke during the summer time. For example, take shaded routes, wear loose-fitting clothing and drink more water.







## Conclusion

As their work usually involves manual labour, couriers may suffer from work-related musculoskeletal disorders (commonly known as injuries of muscles and tendons) affecting their upper limbs, lower limbs, neck and back, etc. Under Part VII of the Occupational Safety and Health Regulation, if an employee is required to undertake manual handling operations, the person responsible for the workplace must assess the risks of these operations and implement suitable preventive and protective measures to reduce the risks brought about by these operations. In addition, employers must assess the respective capabilities of the employees when allocating tasks involving manual handling operations to ensure that they are physically capable of handling such operations. They should also provide suitable training to their employees. For details, please refer to the "Guidance Notes on Manual Handling Operations" and "A Guide to Part VII of the Occupational Safety and Health Regulation (Manual Handling Operations)" published by the Labour Department.

Employers should also take appropriate steps to prevent couriers from suffering heat stroke when working in hot weather. For information on risk assessment and preventive measures, please refer to the checklist on "Risk Assessment for the Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work", and the guide on "Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work in a Hot Environment".



## Enquiries

For enquiries about this pamphlet or advice on occupational health and hygiene matters, please contact the Labour Department's Occupational Safety and Health Branch through:

Telephone : 2852 4041  
Fax : 2581 2049  
E-mail : [enquiry@labour.gov.hk](mailto:enquiry@labour.gov.hk)

Information on the services offered by the Labour Department and on major labour legislation can also be found on our website <http://www.labour.gov.hk>.

Information on the services provided by the Occupational Safety and Health Council can be obtained through its hotline 2739 9000 and website <http://www.oshc.org.hk>.



## Complaints

If you have any complaints about unsafe workplaces and practices, please call the Labour Department's Occupational Safety and Health complaint hotline, 2542 2172. **All complaints will be treated in the strictest confidence.**

