Thrift Store Safety: Sorting and Stocking Donated Goods

Lifting clothing and other individual items does not appear to be heavy or harmful. But even lifting light items can cause strains to our body. Over the course of a work shift the number of items lifted adds up and can fatigue our body. We are more susceptible to injury when our body is fatigued. Reaching into boxes and bags can also subject our hands to cuts and scrapes from hidden dangers.

Tips for Sorting and Stocking Donated Goods

1. Reaching into sacks, bags and boxes can unveil hidden dangers. Workers’ hands can be cut and punctured by broken or sharp objects. The use of gloves can help minimize these types of injuries. An assessment identifying hazards and appropriate personal protective equipment should be performed.

2. Standing for long periods while sorting can cause fatigue and stress on the back.  
   a. Elevate one foot onto an object/surface to relieve lower-back stress.  
   b. Give employees the option of sitting or standing (or rotate between the two).  
   c. Provide a cushioning anti-fatigue mat to relieve back and leg stress.

3. Reaching overhead or over shoulder height can stress shoulders and backs.  
   a. Hang clothes on z-racks that are 54 inches or less in height. This generally keeps the elbow and upper arm below shoulder height.

4. Minimize reaching by organizing your work environment so that most processes can be completed within easy reach and while keeping your elbows in close to your body. Step closer to the work.

5. Organizations who use cardboard gaylords have found success by using a pallet tilter to tip the gaylord onto a large table surface. Staff then sort and hang the clothing from this surface. The height of the table is higher than waist level. This height minimizes forward bending when reaching for the clothes.

6. When stocking small household goods, use a cart which minimizes forward bending.  
   a. Stock similar items at the same time to save trips and to reduce congestion throughout the retail floor.

Our safety evaluations, reports and recommendations are made solely to assist your organization in reducing hazards and the potential of hazards and accidents. These recommendations were developed from conditions observed and information provided at the time of our visit. They do not attempt to identify every possible loss potential, hazard or risk, nor do they guarantee that workplace accidents will be prevented. These safety evaluations, reports and recommendations are not a substitute for ongoing, well-researched internal safety and risk management programs. This report does not warrant that the property inspected and its operations are compliant with any law, rule or regulation.
7. Use furniture mover carts, arm straps and other aids for handling chairs, sofas, mattresses and other large items. Some organizations rest a mattress across the legs of a z-rack.

8. Train staff that if they suspect an object is too heavy to be lifted correctly and with ease, they should not attempt to lift it.
   a. Use a mechanical aid or break the load down into its smaller parts. The most common cause of back injury is overloading.
   b. Get help from another staff member.

9. Review the path from the back room to the destination on the retail floor. Remove items on the floor or other furniture which may be in the way of your path.