

Case study:

New Guidance for Safe Plasterboard Installation from British Gypsum

How are MSDs affecting the construction work force?

In the UK there are an estimated 46,000 construction workers suffering from work-related Musculo-Skeletal Disorders (MSD) (HSE, 2020). MSDs can arise from a sudden exertion or repetitive stress injury. Sudden exertion can be caused by undertaking activities outside the body's capabilities and limitations. Repetitive stress injury, however, is caused by prolonged manual handling within the body's capabilities but done many, many times i.e. muscle or joint pain.

MSDs will reduce a person's physical capabilities, their productivity, their earnings and quality of life. In worst case scenarios, it can cut working careers short and create a negative perception of the industry. It is therefore essential that contractors, suppliers and clients work closely to develop safer and healthier ways of working.

British Gypsum, part of the Saint-Gobain group, the UK's leading manufacturer of high-performance drylining systems, are a great example of a supplier who are demonstrating their ongoing commitment to ensure safe handling of plasterboard.

Why is plasterboard handling such a challenge?

Plasterboard is deceptively heavy and awkward to handle, and inexperienced workers can often misjudge their own body's capability, leading to an acute injury or a repetitive strain injury developed over time.

Another challenge is not just the weight and awkwardness of the board, but poor site organisation and conditions can also lead to risk of injury. For instance when carry routes are not clear, dry and free of steps they can increase the risk of unsafe plasterboard handling.

Even for those who are more experienced on site, when working under pressure and to strict deadlines, it is tempting to conduct manual activities in unsafe ways to save time.

It is therefore essential that we continue to educate workers of the risks, provide guidance and develop processes, materials and equipment that will make the job as easy and safe as possible for the site team.

To add another complexity into the mix, COVID-19 Guidance has meant that workers need to also consider social distancing.

What are British Gypsum doing to support the construction industry?

In 2020, British Gypsum recognised that the construction industry was crying out for straight-forward, clear instruction on how construction site productivity can be improved while keeping the workforce protected from COVID-19. As such, they set to work on the following:

- Creating guidance documents, reduced size boards and bespoke processes to ensure safe handling of boards.
- Printing load characteristics and handling weights on all plasterboards.
- Creating 'ey' 900mm wide variants as standard and ensuring bespoke reduced lengths are available.
- Always recommending that workers minimise their manual handling and use mechanical handling as much as possible.
- Working with the Finishes & Interior Sector to create a guide for safer plasterboard installation. British Gypsum even produced an animation to accompany the guidance.

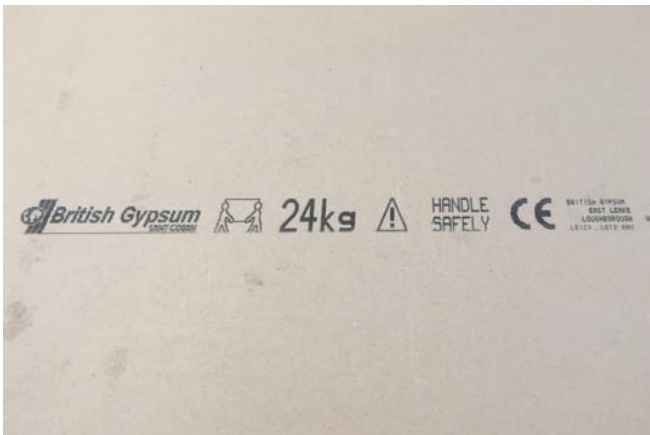


Figure 1: Example of load characteristic and handling weight printing

What is the FIS guide for safer plasterboard installation?

The FIS guide for safer plasterboard installation, was launched in September 2020 and was designed to enable installers to quickly adapt their installation method to meet both COVID-19 requirements and best practice guidance.

Designed as a simple three step process, the Guidance allows for many different on-site situations enabling the installer to modify the installation process based on the individual task and site requirements. The Guidance takes into account the use of mechanical handling systems, where available, and details the safe method of working for both one person and two person tasks.

For more information please [click here](#).

Working together creates a safer environment for us all.

When contractors, suppliers and clients work closely together, we can develop safer and healthier ways of working so that work-related illnesses, such as Musculo-Skeletal Disorders, can be significantly reduced on site.

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