



SAFETY ALERT

Cumulative Strain Awareness

Name:

Date Read:

WHAT HAPPENED

During peak calf-rearing season, a calf rearer's daily routine involved shifting heavy feed bags, lifting stock, and hauling countless buckets of milk and water.

Despite persistent aches and strains in the shoulders, hips and lower back, the worker decided to "tough it out" until the busy season wrapped up. Those ignored niggles eventually became severe musculoskeletal damage that took a full year to recover from. There was no single dramatic accident – the injury built up quietly through repetitive manual handling.

WHY DID IT HAPPEN

The instinct to push through pain and get the job done meant minor aches weren't dealt with when early rest would have made the biggest difference. On farms, safety focus often falls on machinery and vehicle incidents, leaving gradual strain overlooked until it becomes disabling.

WorkSafe and ACC identify that musculoskeletal injuries often develop through cumulative wear and tear from repetitive loads, awkward postures and high forces. Believing "just one more bucket" won't hurt creates a false sense of security – muscles, tendons and ligaments need rest to repair.

KEY LESSONS

- **Act on early warning signs.** Aches, stiffness and tingling mean tissue is overloaded – don't wait for a breakdown before acting.
- **Remove the heavy lift where you can.** Use trolleys (such as a pivot milk bucket trolley), feed hoppers, piping or mechanical aids rather than relying on muscle.
- **Rotate repetitive tasks** such as bucket carrying and calf feeding across the team.
- **Build recovery into busy seasons.** Plan workloads so bodies get rest between demanding shifts.
- **Seek advice early.** See a physio or GP at the first sign of persistent strain.
- **Teach and follow correct lifting technique.** Stop and think, get a firm grip, bend your knees, keep your back straight and the load close, and don't jerk or twist. Anything over 25 kg is a two-person lift.
- **Break the "tough it out" culture.** Pushing through strain doesn't heal it – it turns minor niggles into chronic injuries.



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