

CFMEU SAFETY ALERT

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

SAFE USE OF BULK BAGS

Bulk bags are also known as flexible intermediate bulk containers (FIBC's)

BACKGROUND

An increasing trend in the construction industry is to supply bulk materials, such as sand, blue metal, reo bar and landscape materials in large bulk bags that are lifted into position by a crane. The loads being lifted are considerable, with bags sometimes holding up to three (3) cubic metres or three (3) tonnes of sand or other materials.

Many of the bags used for this purpose are designed for either single trip or multi-trip use, hence are susceptible to damage either through over use or exposure to certain substances, or environmental conditions.

Often bags are reused on site to store building materials or rubbish without consideration of the potential hazard being created which inevitably poses a risk to site personnel and possibly the public.

RISK CONTROLS

The CFMEU recommend that all tasks involving the use of bulk bags are individually risk assessed prior to use. Advice provided in this guidance is designed to assist with the identification and implementation of controls to prevent injury or harm to persons due to the failure of an FIBC.

The controls identified in this guidance are not exhaustive and a combination of measures should be applied to ensure that the safest process is achieved.

GENERAL

To control the risks associated with a freely suspended bulk bag failing, the following is recommended:

- Bulk bags should only be freely suspended when being loaded and offloaded for the purposes of transportation to site; and
- Where possible bags should only be lifted as high as necessary to clear obstacles (as close to the ground as possible) in the travel path.
- The bags should be placed on a pallet and be properly secured or enclosed by a brick cage; or the contents should be transferred to an appropriate lifting container, such as a kibble or a certified bin.
- Bulk bags should not be used to store site rubbish and rubble



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Authorised by Mick Buchan, State Secretary, CFMEU WA, 80 Beaufort St Perth

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SUPPLIERS

Must ensure that manufacturer's specifications and instructions are provided and that sufficient information is provided to ensure it can be used accordingly. Bags used to lift bulk material should only be supplied with the following information attached:

- Name and address of the manufacturer and supplier (if different).
- Manufacturers or suppliers, reference (which shall be unique to any one FIBC type).
- Date of manufacture (month and year).
- Safe working load (SWL), marked in kilograms.
- For single-trip FIBCs, the words 'fill once only'
- For all FIBCs, instructions on the method of lifting.
- The words 'protect from direct sunlight'.

ON BUILDINGS SITES

All bags must be used in accordance with manufacturer's specifications/instructions. Bags that arrive on site without the manufacturer's specifications should not be used, unless on a pallet and restrained in a brick cage.

- Bags that show any sign of damage should be taken out of service immediately.
- All lifting must be carried out by a competent person who holds a High Risk Work License for dogging, and in compliance with slinging techniques specified in the Australian Standards.
- Bags that are intended to be used only once should have the lifting straps cut and be tagged Out of service.
- Bags that are damaged or have been exposed to any chemical or environmental exposure should have the lifting straps cut and be tagged Out of Service.
- Bags should be stacked where there shall be no leakage of contents nor protrusion of the liner if fitted.
- Storage of empty bags and liners should be in such a manner that accidental damage and exposure to prolonged sunlight, chemicals and extreme climatic or environmental conditions are avoided.

STORAGE OF FILLED FIBCs. It is most important that the manufacturer's storage recommendations are followed in order to obtain the maximum life and performance from the container, and to avoid damage to the contents.

Faults to look for when inspecting bulk bags can include but are not limited to, abrasion, cuts, contusions, ultra violet degradation, chemical attack, and damage to coatings or stitching's.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SAFE USAGE OF BULK BAGS

Select the right bulk bags for the job, in consultation with the manufacturer or supplier.

Read the instruction label on the bulk bag

Inspect multi-trip bulk bags before refilling

Check that the discharge spout is closed off before filling

Ensure that the filled bulk bag is stable

Close the top inlet correctly

Use lifting gear of sufficient capacity to take the suspended load

Adjust forklift tines to the correct width for the bulk bag being handled

Tilt the mast of the forklift truck rearwards to an appropriate angle

Ensure that crane hooks are of adequate size and well rounded

Take appropriate measures in regard to dust control

Consider the possibility of static electricity hazards

Protect the bulk bags from rain and prolonged sunlight

Ensure that bulk bags are adequately secured in transportation

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WHAT NOT TO DO WHEN USING BULK BAGS

- Don't exceed the SWL under any circumstances
- Don't fill bulk bags unevenly
- Don't stop or start suddenly during transportation or lifting of bulk bags
- Don't drag bulk bags
- Don't allow personnel to be underneath suspended bulk bags
- Don't allow bulk bags to project over the side of a vehicle or pallet
- Don't tilt the mast of the forklift forward
- Don't withdraw forklift tines prior to relieving all the load on the lifting devices
- Don't stack bulk bags
- Don't use second hand bulk bags
- Don't refill single-trip bulk bags



It should be noted, the items above are not an exhaustive list, and that some or all of the recommendations may be used in isolation or in conjunction with each other as the risk needs to be assessed on an individual basis and that it is industry best practice to use a pallet and or cage to lift bulk bags where possible.

Additionally the information contained within this document is aligned with AS/NZS 3668-1989 Flexible intermediate bulk containers—Non-dangerous goods and is intended to be used as a guide only.

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