Changing the water cooler bottle - Team Talk
A team talk on how to safely handle a water cooler bottle when you change it.
Last updated October 2014

Toolbox plan

Team talk aim: To give employees who change the water bottle information and advice on how to do it safely.

Desired Outcomes: Attendees will be able to change the water cooler bottle in a safe way and minimise their risk of harm.

Who should attend: Anyone who changes the water bottles.

Who delivers the team talk: Line managers/supervisors to their teams. It is not expected for staff to read this. It should be delivered to encourage discussion.

Pre-requisites: Attendees have read: Is your back safe? leaflet.

Resources: Copy of the Changing the Water Bottle guide to put next to the dispenser. Attendee signature sheet. (Must include attendees name, their signature, the date the team talk was given and who gave it. Please keep a copy for your records and send a copy to HSAS as soon as the team talk is completed.)

   Access to your water cooler bottles and dispenser

Programme: 15 minutes + 5 -10 for questions
Why is changing the water bottle cooler risky?

The water cooler bottles are heavy and are lifted from ground level to chest or waist height, depending how tall you are.

![Warning]

To reduce the risk you can have lighter bottles. The larger bottles are approximately 20 kg and the smaller bottles are 13 kg.

The bottles can be easily gripped because they are ridged, have a handle and a neck. However, the water can move inside and make the bottle unstable and awkward to handle.

Changing the bottle involves three tasks:

1. Taking the empty bottle off the dispenser.
2. Getting your new bottle to the dispenser.
3. Lifting the new bottle up and onto the dispenser.

All of these tasks involve lifting, and possibly carrying, a heavy bottle.

The work environment in which you do this can make it more risky. Think about where your dispenser is located. Is it behind a door or in a busy part of the office? Typical office trip hazards, like cables, papers and boxes can get in your way. Make sure you have a clean and clear floor to do the change. Consider whether there is enough space to carry out safe lifting of the bottle. Make enough space to allow you to do the job safely.

It's all about you

The first thing to think about is you. Be honest and decide whether you are capable of lifting up to 20kg!

Sometimes people put themselves at risk because they attempt a lift that's beyond their individual capabilities.

![Warning]

Stop. Ask yourself: ‘am I fit and capable of doing this’? If it is ‘yes’ go ahead. If it is ‘no’ or even a ‘maybe’ don’t attempt the lift. Ask someone else to change the bottle.

Other personal capability considerations that need some thought before you attempt a change.

1. Are you pregnant or a new mother? If you are, it is strongly advised that you do not change the water bottle.
2. Do you have an existing health problem that may increase the likelihood of harm? If you do, please don’t put yourself at risk. Don’t change the bottle.
3. Do you have a temporary health issue that may reduce your ability to do it safely? Again, help yourself to get better and don’t change the bottle.
4. **What are you wearing?** High heel shoes, a skirt or tight clothing? High shoes change your centre of balance when lifting. A skirt can get in the way making it difficult to lift safely and tight clothing can restrict your movements. Think whether you could do it safely in what you’re wearing.

### Pop the top

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To take the empty bottle off the dispenser stand close to the dispenser. Make sure your feet are apart and you are balanced.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get a firm grip on the bottle at the base.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gently pull up and apply enough strength to disengage the bottle neck.</td>
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This can be a bit of a struggle if are not use to it. The bottle can ‘pop’ off and back towards you. Realising that this can happen prepares you for the surprise. The more changes you do, the easier it gets!

You can improve your balance by placing one foot in front of the other.
Let it roll

Make sure you store your water bottles as close as possible to the water dispenser. The water delivery company will put the bottles close to your dispenser for you. They should be easily accessible.

Where are yours? Tucked away under tables or in corners behind other officer items...

Do not carry the bottle. Tip onto its side and let it roll! [1]

If the distance travelled is more than 10 m, a suitable bottle trolley should be used.

Once you arrive at the dispenser you can start the final stage – putting it on.

Putting it on

As with most things in life, there is a knack to doing this. These steps will help you do it smoothly and safely.

1. Make sure you and the bottle are close to the dispenser.
2. Peel-off the sticker [1]. This will help the bottle engage once it is on the dispenser. Otherwise you’ll need to wrestle it onto the dispenser to break the seal.
3. Part your feet so they are on either side of the bottle and you are balanced and stable. You should be able to look down and see the top of the bottle between your parted feet.
4. Reach down and tip the bottle onto its side, then turn it up on end [2]. You have turned it upside down at floor level. Make sure the floor surface is clean – you don’t want to contaminate the bottle top. This step saves you from struggling to do it in mid-lift or at the top of the dispenser. With one
hand hold the handle. With the other support the bottle at the bottom.
5. Some people, however, prefer to rest the bottle on the top of the dispenser and turn it there. If that’s you, tip the bottle slightly forward on the floor and support the bottle bottom with one hand underneath and the other hand on the handle.
6. Power the lift through your strong thigh and buttock muscles NOT your back. Your back muscles are puny compared to your leg muscles. The bottle should come up through your knees and be close to your body. Do not over reach or stoop your back to lift it.
7. Lift the bottle onto the dispenser and guide in so it engages. [3]
Learning checks:

Practical.

If your water bottle is ready to be changed it is recommended that attendees carry out the change as part of the training. Otherwise, attendees can practice the lifting with the bottles. Follow the guidance in the Putting it on to help guide the safe lift.

Questions to ask attendees. This can be done as a Q&A session.

1. Why is changing the water cooler risky?
2. List three workplace hazards that may increase the risk.
3. What’s the first thing you should do before you change the bottle?
4. Name two groups of people who should not attempt the change.
5. What should you be aware of when you take the empty off?
6. Describe how you should move full bottles of water over short distances?
7. Describe how you should not lift the bottle.

Answers

The Changing the Water Bottle guide should be put next to the dispenser to help remind you what to do.

Answers.

1. The water bottles are very heavy – 20 kg or 13 kg.
2. Trip hazards (eg cables, paper and boxes), not enough space and inappropriate location of the dispenser.
3. ‘Am I fit and capable of doing this change?’ (Remind attendees that they should only attempt the change if they are capable.)
4. Any two of the following: pregnant, new mother, existing health problems or temporary health problems.
5. The empty bottle tends to ‘pop’ off the top.
6. Tip the bottle onto its side and roll it.
7. You should not use your weaker back muscles and stoop or over reach to lift it up. (Remind attendees that the lift should be powered by stronger thigh and buttock muscles.)