Material handling on stairs and in tight spaces

Many serious injuries seen in HVAC come from material handling. This is not a surprise as at times the heavy equipment and material involved must be installed upstairs or in tight spaces. This can pose obvious risks and special care must be taken to avoid strains, sprains and worse.

*Safe moving tips in these areas:*

* When moving items that are tall have someone supporting the item up high and down low; this will help to match the slope of stairs and center the weight
* Ensure there are accurate measurements of the area the item must move through; this includes width, depth, and height including extra space for fingers
* When an item can be dismantled to reduce the weight or size take the time to do so
* Never move heavy pieces alone; always bring a second person to assist
* Remove molding around doors if it will ease in the process
* Wear gloves, sleeves, long pants, and boots to protect from the from the furniture slipping and falling
* Always point the top of the equipment on the dolly up the stairs and back the item up each step

*Tools to aid in moving heavy items:*

* Avoid using a standard dolly for commercial bulky items; use an appliance dolly
* Appliance dollies have wider frame, wheels, and can maneuver more easily up and down stairs; they also have straps to secure the equipment
* Shoulder dollies are available for use with 2 people; they work by taking the weight off the back; they rest on shoulders and rely on leveraging other muscle groups
* Shoulder dollies are good for tight spaces because they leave hands free to adjust the furniture; they are not however good for stairs because the weight does not disperse evenly
* Lifting straps are another option that uses leverage and rests on forearms; this can be used for odd, shaped items and for people of different heights
* A moving blanket can also be used to maneuver through tight spaces by sliding the equipment instead of carrying
* Ramps are useful for maneuvering items into odd or tight spaces as well

Use these tips in everyday work to avoid potential serious injury. Taking a little more time on the front end of moving heavy or awkward equipment can prevent back injury in the long run.