

The Young and Vulnerable

Keeping young and new workers safe on the job

A young construction worker was killed when she was hit by a car; a young worker fell to his death through a store's drop ceiling; and another suffered a punctured lung, spinal fracture and concussion when he collided with the tow line lifting device while testing a run at a ski hill. In 2009, 35 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 died in Canada from work-related injuries or illnesses. Another 33,836 were injured severely enough to be granted workers compensation.

Young and new workers are particularly vulnerable to workplace injury or illness, many of the injuries occurring in the first month on the job. The reasons vary. These workers may not fully understand, or be confident about their rights as workers. Eager to impress and accept new challenges, new workers may readily accept risky assignments for which they are not fully prepared and be reluctant to ask questions. They often lack training and experience and may not understand the hazards in the workplace.

The bottom line: anyone who lacks experience and training is at particular risk of getting injured.

What employers can do

Ensuring the safety and health of young and new workers starts with having a good health and safety management system that protects everyone. As an employer you must ensure that safety measures and procedures are in place and followed, to protect all workers. You must ensure equipment, materials and protective devices comply with health and safety laws, and that young workers are trained on - and use - these protective measures at all times.

New and young workers must receive effective health and safety orientation and training before starting to work. This orientation should include information about the company's health and safety policy, their personal responsibilities, hazards in their workplace, and how to protect themselves starting day one. Encourage your young workers to ask questions and to alert their supervisors immediately if they see something that could endanger the safety of themselves or others. And when health and safety concerns are reported, respond promptly to address them.

Don't assign tasks that require a high degree of skill or responsibility to young or new workers. Do not ask a young or new person to work alone or perform critical or risky tasks, such as handling dangerous chemicals. Show the worker how to do each task the safe way, and do it more than once. Be accessible, watch the worker do the task and correct any mistakes. Continue to monitor the worker until you are confident they know how to do the work safely. Provide or ensure that the worker has and uses all necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) such as safety shoes, hardhat or gloves. Make sure the young worker knows where to find it, how to use it, and how to care for it.

What parents can do

Talk to your children about their job. Find out about the tasks they perform; what training and orientation they receive; and what equipment, tools or chemicals they work with. Encourage them to think about potential hazards in the workplace, such as unguarded machinery, chemical products, tools, working alone, working at heights, and any other hazard that applies to their job.

In particular, they should know they have a legal right to be informed about workplace hazards and how to protect themselves; a right to participate in activities that will improve their working conditions; and a right to refuse unsafe work. Tell your children to report an injury or illness immediately to their supervisor - no matter how small.

What young and new workers need to know

All workers have a legal right to a safe work environment and your employer has a responsibility to protect you. You also have an important role to play in ensuring your safety. When you start a new job make sure you understand your rights and responsibilities. If you don't get the

information you need to stay safe on the job, speak up. You can protect your own health and safety or even save your life by asking these questions:

- What are the physical demands of the job?
- Will I have to work very late at night or very early in the morning?
- Will I ever work alone?
- What kind of safety gear will I need to wear?
- Will there be noise? Chemicals? Other hazards?
- What safety training will I receive?
- When will I receive this training?
- Where are the first-aid supplies and fire extinguishers kept?
- Do you have a worker safety policy and an emergency plan?
- What do I do if I get hurt? Who is the first aid person?
- Can you give an example of how employee health and safety is important to your business?

There are resources available for young workers, parents, employers, and teachers that provide information that can help keep new and young workers safe on the job:

[Young Workers Zone](#), CCOHS

[Heads Up Campaign](#), Workers' Compensation Board - Alberta

[So Many Ways](#), Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia

[WorkSafeBC Safety at Work centre for workers under 25](#)

[Young Worker Awareness Program \(YWAP\)](#), Workerplace Safety Insurance Board