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Employer Guide to Young Worker Safety

Young worker safety should be part of your organizations safety program. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), young workers (aged 15-24 years) experience higher rates of job-related injury than do adult workers (aged 25-44). The highest rates are among workers aged 18-19 years.

Contributing factors include:

- The hazards associated with the types of young worker jobs
- Violations of child labor laws
- Lack of skills, experience and training.
- Young workers are also less likely to recognize hazards and voice their concerns if they do.

This guide is intended to help outline the steps needed to prevent or limit young worker injuries.

Pre-employment screening

Since young workers tend to be hired for temporary or seasonal purposes the temptation may be to save costs on pre-employment screening such as physicals and background checks. However, as with any employee the risk for injury remains and therefore screening procedures should be in place for all employees.

- Follow the same screening procedures for all employees and for all positions where required no matter the age.
- Be sure to follow state and federal laws to avoid violations regarding discrimination and the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) such as requiring the physical following a conditional offer of employment.
- Keep candidates medical history confidential and separate from other employment records.
- Work with physicians providing screenings to provide them with an up to date and fully descriptive job descriptions.
- Only job related conditions should be examined.

Understand your limits with the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

The FLSA child labor provisions are designed to protect minors by restricting the types of jobs and the number of hours they may work. Many hazardous activities are limited or prohibited by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The Fair Labor Standards Act limits the hours minors under 16 can work and prohibits employing minors under age 18 for certain hazardous occupations. Keep in mind that many states have additionally requirements and limits that may be more strict than the FLSA so be sure to check your local regulations. [Click here for a list of FLSA fact sheets and FAQ's for age groups and job type.](#)

Implement a comprehensive training program

Whether the employee is seasonal or a permanent employee they require training. In many states this training is required by their version of OSHA and they may have resources to help provide the training. Keep in mind that this may be the first job for many of your younger workers and it should not be assumed that they have any training or experience. Some young workers may be embarrassed to speak up on their limitations so it is a good idea to be as task specific with your training as possible.



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Here are some tips:

- Assess and eliminate hazards for adolescent workers where possible.
- Supervisors and co-workers can help compensate for inexperience by showing teen workers how to do the job correctly.
- What may be obvious to an adult or simple common sense to an experienced employee may not be so clear to a teen tackling a task for the first time.
- Stress patience with supervisory staff.
- Time spent showing a teen worker the best way to handle a job will result in work done right and without harm to tools or injury to the teen.
- Give clear instructions and tell them what safety precautions to take.
- Ask teen workers to repeat your instructions.
- Give teen workers an opportunity to ask questions.
- Show teen workers how to perform the task.
- Then watch while they do it, correcting any mistakes.
- Ask if they have any additional questions.
- Continue to monitor their work closely.
- Once teen workers know what to do and have demonstrated that they can do the job right, check again later to be sure they are continuing to do the task correctly.
- Be sure that supervisors and co-workers set a good example by following the appropriate rules as well.
- **Document your training**-Any regulatory, process specific and equipment specific training should be documented well. Any violations of your safety policy and training

Provide proper personal protective equipment

- Teen workers may need to wear protective equipment such as safety shoes, hard hats, or gloves, depending on the nature of their work.
- Be sure that teen workers know when they need to wear protective gear, where to find it, how to use it, and how to care for it.
- Follow up consistently to ensure that this is done.
- In other cases, teen workers may simply need to know about safety features of equipment or facilities such as eye wash stations.
- For example, they may need to be aware that they must keep exit doors free from clutter, assure that safety guards remain on machinery or that equipment is turned off or disconnected at the end of each shift.

Emergency Preparation

- Every worker needs to be ready to handle an emergency.
- Prepare teen workers on what to do in the event of an injury to themselves or a co-worker, what to do if they encounter rude customers and what to do if equipment or public property is damaged.
- Provide scenario based training to them in order to test their comprehension.
- Reiterate to supervisors the need to check in with new employees more often and to encourage open dialogue regarding safety.

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