



# Young workers

**What puts them at risk and what can make them safer?**

# Every day in Ontario, an average of nearly 50 young workers under the age of 25 are injured or killed on the job.

**A young worker is defined by Statistics Canada as a person between the ages of 15 and 24.\* If we look at the statistics, we see that any worker is more likely to be injured in their first few months on the job, and naturally many young workers are on the job for the first time.**

## What are the factors that put young workers at risk?

There are several reasons why young workers have more incidents than older workers. One is that young workers tend to consider themselves invincible. They don't think anything very bad could happen to them.

Another reason is lack of experience and training. New workers often try to create a good impression by working hard and fast, they can't recognize danger and assess it, and they are reluctant to report unsafe conditions for fear of reprisal from their employers.

In addition, young workers may not be used to the physical demands placed on them, especially in labour-intensive jobs such as construction.

And in the case of high-risk sectors such as construction or utility work, young workers tend to be faced with unfamiliar hazards.

## Reducing the risks

The statistics cited above point to the need for worker orientation and training before work starts. Several measures can be taken for reducing risks to young workers. These include:

- Intervention during the first few weeks of employment before young workers develop unsafe habits.
- Training to ensure that safe work practices are taught and followed.
- Orientation and familiarity with the workplace.

Too often, a failure to provide competent supervision and training, to follow accepted industry practices, and to take reasonable precautions can lead to occupational injury, illness, or death.

## Entry-level training programs

Entry-level training programs can help to offset some of the risks to young workers and lead to safer, healthier workplaces for everyone. In several industries and jurisdictions, entry-level training has reduced incidents by increasing awareness and compliance. The use of the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) across Canada is one example of how training has helped to reduce occupational hazards.

Starting in 2014, Ontario made safety awareness training a requirement for all workers. This training introduces workers to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. It focuses on the health and safety rights and responsibilities of workers, supervisors, and employers. It also serves as a general introduction to workplace health and safety but it is not specific to the construction industry. Safety awareness training needs to include the hazards a young worker could encounter on his or her jobsite.

## Did you know?

- Young workers make up the largest percentage of the part-time, temporary, seasonal, contract, and casual workforce.
- Almost half of young workers are in businesses with fewer than 20 employees. On average these companies have higher injury rates than larger companies.
- In Ontario, fewer than half of all young workers receive health and safety training before starting their job or within their first week of work.

\*In Ontario, the minimum age for working in construction is 16.