



Hiring young workers: What employers should know

Summer is here and you may be considering hiring some young workers over the next few months. Do you have an orientation program for young workers to make sure they are ready for the work ahead? Choosing not to give special training and orientation to young workers can be an expensive decision for a company.

The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) defines young workers as workers who are less than 25 years of age, as well as students in summer jobs and co-op placements.

According to the WSIB's 2006 *Young Workers Report*, between 2001 and 2005 in Ontario, there were 69,000 lost-time claims among young workers. Of those claimants, 70 per cent were between the ages of 20 and 24. The remaining 30 per cent were between 15 and 19. There were 52 workplace fatalities.

Like any workers, young workers have the right to know about workplace health and safety hazards, the right to participate in dealing with health and safety issues, and the right to refuse work if they feel it will endanger them. They also have the responsibility to comply with all relevant legislation, wear their personal protective equipment if it is required, report hazards they find, and not create additional hazards.

Many studies suggest that young workers—and new workers in general—are most at risk in the early days of a new job. All workers are at greater risk of getting hurt in their first year with a new employer, but those aged 15 to 24 are in particular danger.

To reduce the risk of injury for your young employees—whether they are full-time or summer-student workers—here are some things that can help keep them safe.

- Have a specific orientation routine that begins on the first day.
- During the interview, explain the job and show them the actual place they will be working. Make sure they are comfortable with it.
- Have them tour the jobsite to learn about emergency procedures and safety practices.
- Assign a mentor to the student. When choosing mentors, look for these qualities:
 - o desire and ability to share their knowledge
 - o thorough understanding of the workplace and the student's work activities
 - o loyalty to company protocols
 - o patience
 - o knowledge of standards and procedures
 - o a strong belief in the internal responsibility system.

It is important to make sure that young workers

- understand all relevant health and safety legislation, as well as workplace policies and procedures that apply to their job
- know what personal protective equipment to use, when to use it, and why it is important
- are informed about the hazards they may encounter on the job as well as the way to report these hazards to their supervisors
- are not afraid of reprisals if they express concern about safety and workload
- know that it is imperative to ask questions and never assume they know the answers.

Once you've considered all those things, you should look at creating or refining your young-worker orientation program. A proper orientation is well worth the investment in time and resources. It should begin on the worker's first day and cover all the basic elements.

- Young workers must be made aware of all relevant legislation that applies to the work they will do. This includes the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* for provincially regulated companies, the *Canada Labour Code Part II* for federal companies, and the basic rights of the worker. Explain their responsibilities under the Act and encourage them to report unsafe conditions and equipment.
- If the workplace has a joint health and safety committee or representative, young workers must be told who these people are and what role they play in the internal responsibility system. Give young workers the company's health and safety policy.

- Young workers must be told about the hazards in their work environment. This may include information on WHMIS, specific machinery, and confined spaces; driver training; or other detailed information needed for their job.
- Young workers will need to know what personal protective equipment to wear. They may also have to be encouraged to wear it. Their fellow employees should act as examples.
- All young workers should be given training on the equipment and tools they may be asked to use. Equipment operation and other complex tasks will require much more comprehensive training. This will include explanations of the operator's manuals and maintenance schedules, hands-on training, and specific rules for each piece of equipment.
- Train young workers in emergency procedures. Describe evacuation requirements, meeting areas, mayday procedures, and any other emergency processes. Teach them about first aid procedures, and tell them who can help them if they are injured.

It is important to include a broad orientation on procedures and facilities as well as a department-specific training element that delves deeper into the exact nature of the work. Afterwards, evaluate the effectiveness of your orientation program.

Though generic templates and examples are a good place to start, every workplace has different hazards and different safety procedures. So your orientation program should be designed for your own company and the information should be tailored to each department.

Traffic control and young workers

At many construction and utility contracting firms, young workers are often chosen for traffic-control jobs in the summer. Doing traffic control on a jobsite seems like a perfect summer job for a high school, college, or university student. They get to be outside all day, work in a busy, active environment, and learn about the construction industry.

The problem is that people sometimes underestimate how much training and orientation a traffic-control person needs. There's a lot more to it than simply holding a stop-and-go sign.

If you have young workers doing traffic control this summer, make sure to do the following as part of their training:

- Explain the plan for traffic protection and control for the jobsite to everyone, including traffic-control people. Point out the pathways for pedestrians, for equipment, and for vehicle traffic.

- Point out all equipment operators' blind spots.
- Establish escape routes for traffic-control people, especially if the jobsite is near a highway or other busy road.
- Explain to the traffic-control people how the traffic-control plan may be modified if road conditions change because of the weather.
- Make sure the traffic-control people wear the right personal protective equipment: a class E, type 1 or 2 hard hat; CSA-certified, grade-1 safety boots; and a high-visibility safety vest that complies with the regulations and meets the CSA standard for a Class-2 garment.
- Explain the difference between a traffic-control person and a signaller. Traffic-control people should not perform the duties of signallers unless they are trained to do so.

