

Attention Ontario contractors who employ young workers

Contractors who have young employees should remember that those workers need more help and training than older, more experienced workers.

Start young workers off right. Tell them what they need to do. Show them how to do it. Watch them as they work. Mentor them. They could be your sons or daughters. Make sure they know:

- Hazards to watch out for
- Safeguards to follow
- People to ask

As an employer in Ontario, you have duties under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. The *Act* states that an employer must take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker (Section 25(2)(h)). This requirement has been used to prosecute everything from a failure to install guardrails to a failure to provide adequate supervision and training. Please take the time to read Part III of the *Act*, “Duties of Employers and Other Persons.”

Statistics show that a significant percentage of all injuries to workers happen within their first 30 days on the job. This highlights the importance of training and orientation—especially for young workers.

Inexperienced workers generally have more accidents than veteran workers. Although safety awareness grows with experience, early education in health, safety, and job skills can keep new workers safer right from the start. Accident-prevention training should begin as soon as the young worker joins your company. Training is a vital part of orientation. Your company’s health and safety policy and program should provide for both.

You have a duty to train new workers before they start work

The law requires you to give young workers the following training:

- WHMIS
- Working at heights (fall protection)
- Ontario’s Health and Safety Awareness Program for Workers
- Specific tasks such as traffic control and confined space entry, as required
- Emergency procedures, including fall rescue
- On specific equipment such as power tools, chainsaws, forklifts, hoisting equipment, fire extinguishers, and elevated work platforms

New workers must be told and, if necessary, trained and shown what is expected of them:

- Work performance
- Safe operation of tools and equipment
- Proper use of any required personal protective equipment and clothing
- Maintaining a clean job site



Training is also necessary in the following situations:

- When a worker is assigned to a new job.
- When equipment, material, or procedures are new to the worker.
- When inadequate performance is observed.

New workers need orientation

- Provide them with a copy of the company health and safety policy.
- Explain the project and their duties.
- Alert workers to any hazards on a site and the protective measures required.
- Explain requirements for wearing personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Outline the procedures for emergencies and reporting accidents.
- Show where to find the first aid kit and fire extinguishers.
- Stress the importance of avoiding trip and fall hazards.

A new worker can absorb only so much information in the first few days. But if you repeat the safety information in the company health and safety policy and program time and time again, it will reduce injuries.

Whenever possible, use the buddy system to follow up on orientation. Pairing a new worker with a veteran can help each to work more safely. You will reinforce the new worker's training and at the same time make the veteran more aware of safety.

Learn how young workers think

Surveys conducted by the WSIB and other organizations show that young workers have some thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes that can be dangerous.

Here are some examples:

"I'll do almost anything my employer asks me to."

"I assume the equipment and chemicals I work with are safe."

"I don't know much about health and safety rights and responsibilities."

"I don't want to ask too many questions. I might lose my job."

"I've got to work hard and fast. I don't want anyone to think I'm lazy."

Know what works with young workers

Again, studies conducted by the WSIB and other organizations show how to get young employees to listen, follow instructions, and understand why it's important to work safely. For example:

"Show me realistic cause and effect examples of what can go wrong."

"Pay me for the time you want me to spend training or reading the stuff you give me."

"Don't just tell me to be careful. Show me how to do it right."

Encourage them to ask questions

Learning by trial and error can be dangerous. When young workers have questions about equipment, materials, or providers, they should feel comfortable asking their supervisors for answers. They should also be encouraged to report injuries and dangerous situations.

