

How to protect new workers

No matter their age, employees who are new to your industry need more help and training than experienced workers.

It has long been known that workers are more likely to be injured during their first few months on the job. Young workers, defined by Statistics Canada as those between the ages of 15 and 24*, are particularly at risk. But jobsite hazards can victimize anyone who is new to work in the construction, transportation, or electrical utilities sectors, regardless of age.

There are several reasons why new workers have more incidents than workers with more experience. Youthful overconfidence plays a role: younger workers tend to consider themselves invincible. But more significant is new workers' relative lack of experience and training.

They may not be used to the physical demands placed on them. They may try to make a good impression by working too hard and fast. They may not recognize unfamiliar hazards or know how to address them appropriately. They may even be reluctant to report unsafe conditions for fear of reprisal from their colleagues or employers.

It's important, then, to start new workers off right. Tell them what they need to do. Show them how to do it. Watch them as they work. Mentor them. Get them trained. And make sure they know that their safety is your priority.

Start with an orientation

As an employer in Ontario, you have duties under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA), while federally regulated employers must abide by the *Canada Labour Code*. The OHSA 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.

That training starts with giving new workers an orientation to help them understand how your company manages workplace health and safety:

- Provide workers with a copy of the company health and safety policy.
- Explain the project and their duties.
- Identify 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 incidents.
- Show where to find the first aid kit and fire extinguishers.
- Stress the importance of avoiding trip and fall hazards.

New workers also must be told and, if necessary, shown what is expected of them when it comes to:

- Work performance
- Safe operation of tools and equipment
- Proper use of any required PPE and clothing
- Maintaining a clean jobsite.

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



Build skills with training

Beyond gaining familiarity with your company's policies and practices, the law requires you to ensure that new workers receive basic health and safety awareness training, such as Ontario's Worker Health and Safety Awareness in Four Steps program, which can be completed online. As a best practice, many employers also mandate that their workers undertake WHMIS 2015 and working at heights (fall protection) training.

Workers must also get task-specific training, depending on the type of work they do. This could include jobsite instruction (by a competent person) on the correct use of equipment such as power tools, chainsaws, forklifts, hoisting equipment, fire extinguishers, and elevated work platforms. It may also mean enrolling in formal training on topics such as confined space entry, trenching safety, and traffic control.

Likewise, training is necessary when:

- A worker is assigned to a new job
- Equipment, material, or procedures are new to the worker
- Inadequate performance is observed.

IHSA offers affordable, expert-led training programs on dozens of topics, including those previously noted. Our Entry-Level Construction course, available in-class or online, is especially well suited to new workers. It provides an overview of many common hazards and their controls at dynamic, multi-trade jobsites.

Visit ihsa.ca/training to learn more and to register.

Reinforce safety on the job

Early orientation and training are necessary for new workers, but they can only absorb so much information in the first few days or weeks on the job. This is where your company's overall health and safety culture comes in. Repeatedly communicating with workers about health and safety, through daily safety talks, jobsite posters, and other measures will help hammer home the message and reduce the possibility of incidents.

If you see a new worker performing a task in an unsafe way, correct their behaviour so it doesn't become a habit. You can also consider pairing new workers with their more experienced colleagues. This can reinforce the new worker's training and at the same time remind the experienced worker of their own safety obligations.

And encourage your new workers to ask questions (of you and their coworkers). Learning by trial and error can be dangerous. When young workers are uncertain about equipment, materials, or procedures, they should feel comfortable asking their supervisors for answers. They should also be encouraged to report near misses and dangerous situations.

IHSA is Ontario's trusted health and safety resource for the construction, transportation, and utility sectors. We have everything you need to help your business work safe every day.

Health and safety resources

From job-specific manuals to electrical utility work tags, IHSA has products to help you improve every aspect of jobsite health and safety.

Expert training

Whether you're looking for hands-on working-at-heights training or on-demand eLearning about defensive driving, IHSA offers dozens of valuable skills-based courses taught by subject-matter experts.

Consulting services

Our experienced consultants conduct site-safety evaluations, COR® and IRS audits, ergonomic assessments, in-cab evaluations, and much more.

Industry collaboration

IHSA works closely with industry partners and associations through our network of Labour-Management committees, advisory councils, and Section 21 committees—to advocate for healthier, safer workplaces.

Small business supports

We help small business owners protect themselves and their workers, with resources to help you understand your legal obligations, perform jobsite inspections, formalize your health and safety practices, and much more.