

PROTECTING YOUNG WORKERS

A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

OVERVIEW

Young workers, under the age of 25, make up almost 12% of the workforce (1). While there are many benefits to youth working, including the development of job skills and responsibility, increased self-esteem, and earned income, young workers are two times more likely to get injured on the job than older workers. In 2020, over 350 young workers died from work-related injuries; 26 of these workers were under the age of 18 (2).

YOUNG WORKERS ARE DIFFERENT THAN OLDER WORKERS

Young workers' brains and bodies continue to develop up to age 25, putting them at increased risk for injury.

They may:

- Engage in risky behaviors and lack impulse control
- Be afraid to speak up when they have questions or concerns
- Have poor decision-making skills
- Be smaller in stature and not as strong as adults (but perform the same work)

Employers play an active role in protecting these vulnerable workers. Enforcing workplace policies, providing consistent training and supervision, and communicating effectively with young workers about health and safety hazards are key to protecting them.

EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

- Follow federal and state labor laws addressing working hours and assigning appropriate tasks for young workers, including restrictions on performing dangerous or hazardous work. Label equipment that young workers are not allowed to operate.
- Provide training on hazard recognition and safe work practices, including required safety gear. Training should include prevention of fires, injuries, violent situations, and what to do if injured.
- Tell young workers where to get answers to safety and health questions, including what to do if they get injured at work.
- Assign tasks that are appropriate to the young worker's physical and cognitive ability (e.g., body size, strength, ability to follow multi-step directions, previous experience with the task).
- **For a complete list, visit:**
<https://www.osha.gov/young-workers/employer-responsibilities> (3).

WORKPLACE POLICIES

Workplace policies keep employees and supervisors accountable. Having workplace policies and consistently enforcing them protects all workers. Young workers should be aware of policies and what will happen if they do not follow the rules.

Things to include in a policy:

- Employees are not required to do job that is unsafe – but need to communicate their concerns to a supervisor
- Injuries (and near-misses) should be reported immediately
- Only operate equipment you have been trained to operate
- No use of cell phones when moving vehicles or performing dangerous tasks

MODELING SAFE BEHAVIORS

Workers will do what you do, not what you say. Your behaviors – whether safe or not – are the ones workers are likely to adopt.

For example, come to work rested and focused, each day assess the worksite for hazards and implement methods to control these hazards, use PPE (seatbelts, hearing and eye protection, gloves, sunscreen), take breaks, drink plenty of water, and follow workplace policies.

TRAINING YOUNG WORKERS

Training should be ongoing: when hired, when given a new task or tool, whenever there is a new hazard in the workplace, after an injury or close call, and periodically review.

Training should cover:

- How to do a job or task
- How to recognize hazards
- How workplace policies apply to the task or tool being taught
- How to use personal protective equipment (PPE)
- What to do if problems arise
- What guidelines to follow in case of an emergency
- How to report an injury or near-miss (close call)

Ask open-ended questions to check for understanding (rather than yes/no)

- Don't ask, "Do you understand?"
- Do say, "Please tell/show me how to do this."
- "Describe how you will perform this task."
- "What safety precautions do you need to think about?"
- "Tell me who you will ask if you have a question about this job."

1 NIOSH (2022). Analysis of the Current Population Survey. Morgantown, WV: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Unpublished.

2 Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022). Table A-7. Fatal occupational injuries by worker characteristics and event or exposure, all United States, 2020.

3 <https://www.osha.gov/young-workers/employer-responsibilities>

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SCAN FOR MORE
WORKPLACE RESOURCES

