

On the Job Young Workers at Risk



Resource: Minnesota Safety Council

Teen worker safety is a year-round issue, but the approach of summer means even more youth will be on the job. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), 80 percent of teens have worked by the time they finish high school and each year 84,000 are injured on the job seriously enough to seek emergency department treatment. NIOSH points out that teens are likely to be inexperienced and unfamiliar with many of the tasks required of them, and they may not be comfortable asking questions. Safety is likely to be low on their radar and they may take on tasks for which they've received no safety preparation. Further recent research in brain development suggests that the brain, specifically the part responsible for planning, judgment and self-control, is not fully developed until the early twenties.

In addition to workplace-specific training, which NIOSH identifies as most critical, the agency recommends providing young people with general health and safety skills that will apply from job to job. Specifically:

- The ability to recognize hazards
- An understanding of how hazards can be controlled
- What to do in an emergency
- What rights they have on the job
- How to speak up effectively when problems arise at work

A variety of resources exist to help employers, educators, parents and teens themselves reduce injuries in this high-risk group:

- OSHA's Teen Worker Web page, with resources for employers, teachers, parents and teens at www.osha.gov/SLTC/teenworkers/index.html.
- Youth @ Work: Talking Safety, an activity based curriculum designed to provide a foundation in occupational safety and health. This group training includes instructor and participant materials, a 10-minute video (containing peer interviews with teens who have been injured) and PowerPoint slides. The course can be completed in 3-5 hours, but also contains suggestions for how it can be shorted if need be. Published by NIOSH and the University of California at Berkley, it's available in a Minnesota-specific version at www.cdc.gov/niosh/talkingsafety/states/mn/entireMN.pdf.
- Youth Worker Safety and Health Topic Page, a comprehensive resource with links to research, statistics, programs and information for teens themselves at www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/youth/.
- Information about Minnesota's child labor laws at www.doli.state.mn.us/childlbr.html.