



FEATURE



Providing a Safe Workplace for Teens

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Work gives teenagers a sense of responsibility, a source of income, and career training. It can also help them become more independent, mature, and have a desire for increased challenges. Industrial hygienists, like myself, are specifically involved with young worker safety and health. With the summer job season just around the corner, I want to ensure that business owners, parents, and teens have the necessary tools to ensure the safety of our young workforce.

The Facts

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics

(2000), 2.9 million students ages 15 to 17, work during the school year, and 4 million students of the same age work during the

summer. And, according to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), 70 to 80% of teens who have worked

Federal and State Laws to Protect Young.

Know the federal child labor laws and the state child labor laws for the area in which you live.

Federal law limits the number and hours that 14- and 15-year-olds can work in non-agricultural worksites.

Teens are not permitted to work during school hours, before 7 a.m., or after 7 p.m. between Labor Day and June 1. During the summer, they can work only between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m. (Again, state laws may be more stringent.) When school is in session, teens aren't allowed to work more than 18 hours each week, more than three hours on a school day, or more than eight hours on a weekend day or holiday. When school is not in session, they're prohibited from working more than 40 hours each week or eight hours per day.

Here's an example of jobs and work-related activities that the federal government prohibits for non-agricultural workers under 18. (Some states have even stricter regulations.)

- Driving a motor vehicle as a regular part of the job or operating a forklift
- Operating many types of power equipment such as meat slicers, power saws, and bakery machinery
- Wrecking, demolition, excavation, or roofing
- Logging, mining, or working in sawmills
- Meat packing or slaughtering
- Any job involving exposure to radiation
- Any job where explosives are manufactured or stored

Anyone age 14 or 15 is also banned from the following jobs or work-related activities:

- Baking or cooking
- Operating power-driven machines such as lawnmowers and electric hedge clippers. (Low-risk machines like photocopiers and computers are all right.)
- Climbing ladders or scaffolding
- Working in warehouses
- Manufacturing, building, or working in construction
- Loading or unloading trucks, railroad cars, or conveyors

For a complete list of prohibited jobs, see the Department of Labor's Fair Labor Standards Act Advisor. Youth of any age may be employed at any time, in any occupation in agriculture on a farm owned or operated by their parent or guardian. See the Department of Labor's Child Labor Laws advisor for more information on agricultural employment.



FEATURE

for pay outside of the home during their high school years have faced workplace hazards.

NIOSH estimates that each year in the U.S., 230,000 young workers suffer work-related injuries. Of these, 77,000 require treatment in hospital emergency rooms, and sadly, an average of 67 young workers under age 18 die each year (1992-2000) from work-related injuries — that's about one death every five days. It is estimated that an additional 100 young workers die every year from hazards associated with working on farms.

Why Teens Suffer More Injuries

We know from injury statistics that teens are twice as vulnerable to work-injuries than adults. Teens are eager to try new tasks outside their usual work assignments without training. They have an illusion of invulnerability and take risks — new research indicates that the frontal lobes of the brain, where the executive functions reside, are not fully matured until age 25. Teens try to please supervisors even if the job is hazardous or may be illegal. They want to do a good job and to be seen as competent and responsible, but they are reluctant to ask for help, don't seek clarification, or are afraid of losing their job if they voice safety concerns.

Teens also lack work experience and the physical, emotional, and cognitive maturity needed for certain tasks. They may be unfamiliar with work requirements and safe operating procedures, and they may fail to recognize hazardous work situations. They probably don't know their legal rights or which work tasks are prohibited by child labor laws. They may also learn unsafe behaviors from co-workers.

Sometimes employers are the root problem.

They may not be complying with Federal and State Child Labor Laws. There may be an absence of comprehensive safety programs and training programs, a failure to provide equipment with safety features, a lack of personal protective equipment, or a lack of supervision.

Employers may give adult tasks to larger teens without regard for their lack of experience and maturity and without realizing the internal physical difference between teens and adults. If teens are exposed to asthma-causing agents and substances, it can disrupt the function of maturation of the endocrine and central nervous system. Teens experience rapid growth of the organ system, which can be harmed by exposure to hazardous substances. They also experience rapid musculoskeletal growth and can develop cumulative trauma disorders.

The Most Dangerous Jobs

The primary causes of work-related teen deaths are motor vehicles, machines, electrocution, and homicide. The deaths are primarily the result of transportation incidents involving on- or off- highway motor vehicles, as well as industrial vehicles such as tractors and forklifts. After transportation, the most common events leading to death are contact with objects and equipment, assaults and violent acts, exposure to harmful substances and environments, and falls.

According to the NIOSH, most deaths occur in the agricultural, forestry, and fishing industries. In fact, 15- to 17-year-olds are four times more likely to die in a farm-related incident than youngsters in other workplaces. In order of ranking, the other industries where teen deaths occur are the

retail trade, including restaurants and retail stores followed by construction; services, including nursing homes, amusement parks, and swimming pools; and the last is manufacturing.

The Employer's Responsibility

Not only is protecting the young workforce the moral and legal responsibility of employers, it makes good business sense. The direct and indirect cost of teen work-related injuries has been estimated at \$5 billion annually.

Anyone who employs teen workers must know and comply with the labor laws in the 1970 Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act which mandates that employers must provide a workplace that is free from serious recognized hazards. The employer should not engage teens under 18 years of age to work in any occupation that is deemed to be hazardous. Obviously, employers must be able to recognize the hazards first. A listing is available on the Department of Labor website and in the sidebar that accompanies this article. The employer must supervise young workers, provide appropriate safety training, as well as develop an injury and illness prevention program. It is also the responsibility of the employer to check state laws and regulations, as well as the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) to understand employer responsibilities and to comply with the indicated requirements.

About the Author

John Palassis is a member of the American Industrial Hygiene Association's Management Committee and the Communications and Training Methods Committee.



FEATURE

ON THE NET

Department of Labor

www.dol.gov/dol/topic/youthlabor/hazardousjobs.htm

List of State Labor offices in the United States

www.dol.gov/esa/contacts/state_of.htm

Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

www.dol.gov/esa/programs/whd/state/state.htm

Federal Child Labor Laws

www.dol.gov/elaws/esa/flsa/cl/default.htm

State Child Labor Laws

www.dol.gov/esa/programs/whd/state/state.htm

Fair Labor Standard Act advisor

www.dol.gov/elaws/esa/flsa/docs/haznonag.asp

Child Labor Laws advisor

www.dol.gov/elaws/esa/flsa/cl/y3.asp

American Industrial Hygiene Association

www.aiha.org

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