

# Tips for safely employing young workers

Most injuries to young workers occur within the first 12 months of employment. So what can you do?

The term “young worker” can include teens, young adults, and anyone new to the workforce. Young workers want to perform well at work, but they need help to work safely. The following risk factors should be considered when employing youth:

- They lack on-the-job experience, including an understanding of the risks associated with each job.
- Young people in general tend to feel invincible and may be more apt to take risks on the job.
- Young workers are usually not aware that they have rights and responsibilities and some job tasks are illegal for them to do.
- Young people have trouble relating cause and effect and therefore don't consider how an injury today could disable them for life.
- They have a desire to prove themselves and, therefore, may do unsafe things.
- Young workers may be reluctant to ask questions.
- They may lack awareness of risks on the job, including the fact that they could be killed while at work.

Employers should take the following steps to help prepare youth to work safely. Young workers will take what they learn with them throughout their working career.

## Teach young workers how to identify hazards

- Young workers don't realize that hazards exist in every working environment:
  - Physical hazards
  - Biological hazards
  - Chemical hazards
  - Other (noise, vibration, radiation, etc.)
- Young workers may assume that you (the employer) have protected them. They may not realize that staying safe is their responsibility as well. Help them understand the need to protect themselves with the use of critical thinking, hazard recognition, and personal protective equipment.
- Young workers may not know where to find safety information on the chemicals used in the working environment.

## Training youth to work safely is a multi-step process:

- Give them clear instructions and tell them what safety precautions to take.

- Ask them to repeat your instructions and give them an opportunity to ask questions.
- **Show** them how to perform the task.
- Watch as they do the task and correct any mistakes until they complete it correctly.
- Finally, ask if they have any additional questions.
- Check again later to verify they continue to do the task correctly and safely.

## Help them find ways to make the job safer

- Educate young workers on the safety procedures of your establishment, including how to use personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Young workers may not understand the three control measures

that can be used to keep them safe:

- Engineering controls that remove the hazards
- Work policies that control the hazard
- PPE that creates a barrier between them and the hazard



- Young workers may not be aware of changes they can make to create a safer workplace.
- Direct them to the Oregon OSHA website, [www.orosha.gov](http://www.orosha.gov), for additional information about on the job safety and health.

### Train and supervise young workers

- Train young workers to notify their supervisors if they are injured on the job.
- Establish a mentoring program where all young workers are assigned a seasoned worker who will help train them, be available for questions, and guide them through their first year of employment.

### Prepare young workers for emergencies

- Young workers probably have little or no experience in an emergency situation. Talk with them about your emergency action plan and what will happen if an emergency occurs. Include all types of emergencies: hostile or violent customers, fire, earthquake etc.
- Young workers need to understand and practice the emergency action plan.

- Don't let young workers work alone towards closing time or after dark.

### Help young workers understand their rights

- Most young workers aren't aware that there are additional rules that apply only to them.
- Young workers may not know what agencies govern these rights or who to call with questions.

### Teach them to take action if necessary

- Young workers may feel intimidated approaching a supervisor or boss with concerns. Talk with them about who they should talk to if they feel something is unsafe.
- Young workers may do a task that is dangerous or that they are not trained

for in an attempt to please the boss. This is often how young workers get injured on the job. During initial training encourage them to come to you if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

### Ideas from other employers

- Issue different colored vests to employees under the age of 18, so supervisors know who is not allowed to operate certain prohibited equipment, such as an electric meat slicer.
- Use a computerized tracking system to ensure that workers younger than 16 years of age are not sched-

uled for too many hours during school weeks.

- On the first day of work, give all new young workers a laminated pocket-sized "minor policy card" which explains your company's young worker health and safety policies.

- Train all supervisors in the requirements of the federal and state child labor laws. Refresher training at periodic intervals is also equally important.
- Place warning stickers on equipment that young workers can not legally operate or clean. As part of YouthRules! The US Department of Labor is making these stickers available to employers while supplies last. In addition, these stickers can be downloaded at [www.youthrules.dol.gov](http://www.youthrules.dol.gov).
- Conduct internal compliance checks to ensure you achieve and maintain compliance with all youth employment rules.



## RESOURCES

Oregon Young Employee Safety  
[www.oregonyoungworkers.org](http://www.oregonyoungworkers.org)

The Oregon Young Employee Safety coalition (O[yes]) is a group of Oregon stakeholders that works to prevent young worker injuries and fatalities.

SAIF Corporation  
[www.saif.com](http://www.saif.com)

SAIF is Oregon's not-for-profit, state-chartered workers' compensation insurance company. Visit: [www.saif.com](http://www.saif.com) > I am: An Employer > Safety > Young workers

Center for Research on Occupational and Environmental Toxicology  
[www.CROETweb.com](http://www.CROETweb.com)

CROET's mission is to promote health and prevent disease and disability among working Oregonians and their families. Visit: [www.croetweb.com](http://www.croetweb.com) > young workers

US Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division  
[www.dol.gov/esa/whd](http://www.dol.gov/esa/whd)

The WHD Enforces federal minimum wage, overtime pay, recordkeeping, and child labor requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act.

Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration  
[www.orosha.org](http://www.orosha.org)

Oregon OSHA's mission is to advance and improve workplace safety and health for all workers in Oregon.

Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries  
[www.oregon.gov/boli](http://www.oregon.gov/boli)

BOLI enforces state minimum wage, working condition, and child labor regulations, provides compliance assistance, and issues employment certificates to employers and various special employment permits.

U.S. Department of Labor; Employment and Training Administration  
[www.doleta.gov](http://www.doleta.gov)

The Employment and Training Administration (ETA) seeks to build the labor market by training and placing workers through employment services.