



City Safe

A Guide To Assist In Training
Employees About:

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Teen Workers And Safety: What Every Supervisor Needs to Know

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It is almost summertime. For some, this means vacations and lemonade. Fireworks will be exploding before we know it, and everyone will be firing up the old barbecue grill.

While you are busy dreaming about basking in the glow of the warm summer sun, do not forget one more telltale sign of summer: all of those teenagers who will be out of school for three months and swelling your payroll.

Having little in common with your teenage summer help does not mean you will be unable to discuss safety with these young employees. For many of them, the job with your organization will be their first experience in the working world. Remember that what they learn from you about safety will stay with them for the rest of their working lives.

Where You Should Start

If you are going to be one of the single most influential people to communicate safety to young workers, you had better know where to start. After all, you have spent a career learning about safety. Translating that into a quick orientation for new workers is not easy. Quite simply, there are too many topics to cover. Helping someone who has no idea of what a lockout/tagout program is or has no clue what MSDS stands for is close to impossible.

Instead of trying to give an overview of everything from asbestos to welding safety, a better approach is to focus on the types of hazards young workers are likely to encounter. Of course, this will depend on what types of jobs teenagers will perform at your facility, but if they are going to fill slots in just about every department, it makes sense to start with the areas where teens suffer the most injuries.

Look At The Statistics

Overall in America, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) says about 230,000 teens suffer a workplace injury every year. Of that, about 77,000 have a serious injury that requires a trip to a hospital emergency room. Unfortunately, about 70 of them do not survive the trip.

Most of the time, it is possible to attribute on-the-job accidents

that occur to teenagers to one of these three causes:

1. They take on jobs and do not receive safety training.
2. They do not have appropriate supervision.
3. They work with dangerous equipment.

You can help reduce the risk of all three of these factors just by offering some initial safety training and then following up to make sure young workers are not taking on additional responsibilities that might expose them to other hazards.

Why You Cannot Afford To Overlook Teen Safety

Since young workers are likely going to be with your organization for only a short time, the temptation is to forego full-blown safety training. Some may see it as unnecessary when a worker will only be on the job for a few months. This is the wrong approach. There is at least one reason why this attitude could end up costing you thousands:

Your workers' compensation premium is partly based on your claims history. Short-term workers qualify as employees for purposes of Kansas' work comp law. This means that if a teen worker suffers an on-the-job injury, he or she is entitled to receive workers' compensation benefits just as other, permanent employees would be. Such an injury would also show up on your claims history and could adversely affect your workers' compensation experience modification factor, causing you to pay higher premiums for years to come.

To prevent this, you must take the time to properly train teenage employees on workplace safety, even if they are not going to be on the job very long or even if you think they are working in a relatively low-risk job. Remember that every six minutes a teenager has to go to the hospital to receive treatment for a work related injury.

How To Make Your Training Effective

To help prevent injuries to young workers, it isn't necessary to have them spend one of their three months in safety training seminars. You can give them the basics quickly, if you focus on the tasks they will perform and the hazards they are likely to face.

Start by giving teens very clear instructions for each task they will be performing. With teen workers, there is a danger of assuming they already know how to do something safely. However, common sense is a learned trait; people develop it over time. Never assume a teen has already experienced a similar hazard on another job or at home. Your assumption could be (and likely would be) completely false. Chances are the worker has never seen a deep fat fryer, and does not appreciate the danger in lifting heavy items.

Teens require detailed, hands-on training on how to use equipment safely, along with a discussion of each possible hazard. One-on-one training is best, so that workers have the opportunity

to ask questions. A young employee may be reluctant to ask questions in front of others, not wanting to reveal unfamiliarity with basic safety concepts. In other words, the worker may be afraid of asking a “dumb” question.

The equipment teen workers will use will probably be new to them. Wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) is likely to also be a new experience. You should never simply hand a pair of safety goggles to a teen worker and expect him or her to know how and when to wear them. This requires additional training. Young workers need to understand that wearing PPE is not optional -- it is something to take seriously to keep them safe on the job.

Make Sure They Follow Through On Training

Once teenagers receive this initial hands-on-training, you should stick around for a while. There is much for a new worker to learn, and safety is soon forgotten. As the teenager begins to understand how to work with a boss, serve customers, and use a cash register for the first time, he or she may not pay proper attention to doing the job safely. Remember that everything is new for a teenage worker. Safety is just one of the new things to learn. With so many new experiences all at once, you do not want teens forgetting about safety. Watch to ensure they actually follow through with what they learned during the one-on-one training.

If you notice an infraction, it is not always necessary to fly off the handle. Point out how the step could have resulted in a serious injury and review the process of using the equipment safely. This will keep young workers from feeling as though safety is merely another way for them to get into trouble on the job. Retraining may be necessary, until the employee fully appreciated the danger and the proper way to perform a task safely.

Younger workers have probably never experienced a workplace accident before. Their initial reaction will likely be one of worrying about blame. They may try to hide their safety infractions because they have no idea what the consequences will be for failing to follow the safety rules. They may fear losing their jobs for even a small violation. Take the time to educate young workers on your safety discipline program. Let them know it is okay to ask for help if they are not sure how to operate something safely.

Make Safety Part Of The Job

Each day, young workers should receive reinforcement that safety is as much a part of their job as earning a paycheck. This starts with you, and every front line supervisor should reinforce this concept. Just because younger workers are new and only working for a relatively short time, does not mean they have nothing to contribute to the safety process. There are many ways to get young workers more involved.

For example, taking young workers along on a safety inspection is a great way for them to see the importance of on-the-job safety. They will learn the effort the organization expends to keep everyone safe at work. They will also appreciate some of the other hazards at the facility so they

avoid unexpected encounters with dangerous materials or areas.

Having a new worker come to a safety committee meeting is another great idea. Not only is it beneficial for the worker, but also the safety committee gets the chance to learn how a brand new employee views safety. The committee will be able to evaluate the effectiveness of initial safety training, and also gain insight into some of the potential hazards older workers may not notice.

Employing younger workers comes with heightened responsibilities. You cannot expect them to understand how to do their jobs safely without receiving some guidance from you. If a young worker suffers an injury and you have not taken the time to provide safety training, you are just as responsible for the accident. You may not be able to “speak their language,” but you can still get your message across.

HOW TO AVOID HEAT STRESS

Heat stress can occur when an employee works in a hot, humid environment while performing hard physical work over a long period of time. An employee who works under such conditions should consume enough water to avoid heat stress.

Before you begin a task, consult with your supervisor to determine what you can do to reduce the potential for heat stress.

Some of the things that can be done to avoid heat stress are:

When Possible, Work During the Coolest Times

Schedule tasks requiring the heaviest workload during the coolest part of the day (many cities change the workday for “outside” workers during summer months, to 7:00 am to 4:00 pm, etc.).

Drinking Water Intake

Evaporation of sweat cools the body. Under the conditions that lead to heat stress, the body produces a large amount of sweat. Unless the water lost in sweat is replaced, body temperature will rise.

Drink Enough Water

Drink plenty of water before, during, and after work. Do not rely on thirst. A person can lose a dangerous amount of water before feeling thirsty and the feeling of thirst may stop long before fluids are replaced.

Maintain Weight

Be sure to keep body weight fairly constant. All weight loss because of sweating should be regained every day. People working in heat stress conditions should weigh themselves before work every day and keep weight constant by drinking plenty of water.

Scheduling

Work with your supervisor to determine the optimum work schedule to follow during heat stress conditions.

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“Does your city have a
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