

Protecting young workers

By Joseph Hammond

Before you begin

This session covers the topic in a question-and-answer format. Please adapt this to your situation by including a discussion of seasonal changes at your facility and the responsibility all employees have to protect young workers.



Introduction

Individuals coming into the job market frequently lack the knowledge and skills required in the industrial and construction environment. The classroom may provide certain training, but it frequently falls short in preparing youth for the conditions they will face.

That's where the employer is charged with facilitating their safe entry into the operation's general flow. In fact, statistics show young and inexperienced workers are five times more likely to be injured at work in their first four weeks on a new job.

You can all recall your own attitude with your first job, and you have seen others who your company has added as associates.

Discussion

- Q.** What are feelings you believe new, young employees bring with them?
 - A.** You may hear comments like:
 - Inexperience (Unfamiliar with tasks and unable to recognize hazards);
 - Lack of awareness of rights (Unwilling to ask questions or question work practices);
 - Lack of confidence (Eager to please, which can mean they take on tasks they are unprepared to do);
 - Fear (Afraid to speak up or ask questions);
 - Feeling of immortality (Invincible and indestructible).
- Q.** What are the attitudes of some in supervision?
 - A.** Responses will vary, but you may learn that: Supervisors may give young workers physically demanding or boring, repetitive tasks; Supervisors do not take safety as seriously as production.
- Q.** Are you aware of what jobs are restricted by law that youth under 18 years of age may not perform?

- A.** Among responses are those federal and Ohio law forbid, including:
- Coal and metal mining, logging and quarrying;
 - Manufacture of brick, tile, and clay construction material;
 - Wrecking and demolition;
 - Meatpacking, slaughtering and rendering;
 - Operating power-driven bakery machines including mixers;
 - Operating paper balers and compactors;
 - Roofing and excavation;
 - Operating circular and band saws and guillotine cutters.

(Note: Additional restrictions exist for those who are 15 years of age and under.)

- Q.** What should we do to protect youth and/or employees who are new to the workplace?
- A.** See if you can get responses similar to the answers below.
- Begin by showing them the same respect you reserve for other employees.
 - Take inexperienced employees onto the floor and show them the hazards.
 - Provide job-specific safety training by reviewing job safety analyses.
 - Observe and coach new workers. Quiz workers on where hazards lie (remind and reinforce).
 - Explain their rights, which are:
 - The right to know;
 - The right to participate;
 - The right to refuse unsafe work.

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References

Regulations

Ohio Revised Code Chapter 4109: Employment of Minors
Ohio Administrative Code Section 4101:9-2

Web sites

- Youth Rules! (U.S. Dept. of Labor): www.youthrules.gov
- Young Worker Safety and Health (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health): www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/youth
- Young Workers' Health and Safety Website (The California Resource Network for Young Worker Health and Safety): www.youngworkers.org

Publications

Winn, Winn & Biddle; "Observations on a Teen's First Job," *Professional Safety*, June 2007; p. 46-51.
Miller, Handleman, & Lewis; "Protecting Young Workers," *Professional Safety*, June 2007; p. 38- 45.

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