

Before you begin

Know your audience. What are the age groups of your younger workers? What area(s) do they work in? Knowing this information will assist in your preparation. The focus of this talk should be in those areas in which your younger workers are employed.



Introduction

Ohio BWC claims data indicates that 68% of young workers experienced an injury within the first four months of being on the job. Young workers aged 18-19, accounted for nearly 60% of those injuries. Of those injuries, 22% involved a cut/pierce and 11% included a slip, trip, or fall. Open wounds, contusions, and burns were the top injury types. The top four industries included service (58%), commercial (16%), manufacturing (13%), and construction (5%).

Knowledge in hazard recognition, adequate training, awareness of work restrictions that apply to minors, and workplace distractions are essential in the professional development of the younger workforce. Early intervention provides opportunities for the young workforce to grow, develop, and form safe habits which ultimately create a solid foundation for their future, setting the tone for the rest of their working careers.

Definitions

Young worker: any worker who is under the age of 25.

Minor: in the state of Ohio, any person under the age of 18 is considered a minor and has additional work restrictions that should be considered and discussed in your training.

Discussion

Young workers' rights

All workers have rights. But if you are a young worker new to the workforce, you may not know what those rights are. Be sure your young workers know that they have the right to:

- **Know** what hazards are present on the job and how these hazards can affect them. Proper safety and health trainings and on-the-job instruction help facilitate knowledge gained.
- **Participate** in health and safety activities and report unsafe practices and conditions without fear of being reprimanded.
- **Refuse to perform unsafe work** that is dangerous to themselves or their co-workers.

Hazard recognition

There are many reasons that young workers get hurt or sick on the job: unsafe equipment, unsupervised work, lack of or insufficient training, pressure to get the job done, and dangerous equipment just to name a few.

Many young workers are injured on the job because they are not aware of the hazards in their workplace. The employer is responsible for training employees how to identify and protect themselves from these hazards. Educating your young work force with hazard recognition through facility walk-throughs, hands-on training, written procedures like a job safety analysis, and mentoring with knowledgeable employees are all effective tools.

Some of the areas where young workers get their first jobs are listed below with a few of the hazards that should be evaluated.

Restaurants and food service

Moving equipment like grinders, slicers, blenders, and mixers can cause severe caught-in injuries and amputations. Prevent these types of injuries with proper machine guarding. Exposure to ovens, fryers, dishwashing areas, and kitchen grills can cause thermal burns. Electrical hazards are also a concern when mopping floors around outlets and using equipment that is not properly grounded.

Maintenance and janitorial

Working on live electricals is a huge safety hazard. Electrical hazards can result in shocks, burns, electrocution, and even death. Any rotating, spinning, rolling, or traversing equipment if not guarded properly can pull, catch, or crush employees' fingers, arms, or legs. Chemical exposure is also a concern. Every employee working with or near chemicals has a right to know what the chemical hazards are, what to do if they get the chemical on them, and how to protect themselves from exposure.

Lawncare and landscaping

Many of the hazards listed in the maintenance and janitorial section above are also concerning in lawncare and landscaping. Additional hazards commonly associated with the landscaping industry are exposure to high noise levels, thermal extremes leading to heat stress and cold stress, and exposure to dangerous snakes, insects, and plants.

Industrial environments

Many of the hazards listed in the areas above also apply to industry: electrical hazards, machine guarding, chemicals, thermal hazards, and noise. Every employer will have hazards specific to their workplace. Some additional hazards to consider are confined spaces and slips, trips, and falls.

Proper training

Effective training and education can be provided outside a formal classroom setting. Peer-to-peer training, on-the-job training, and worksite demonstrations can be effective in conveying safety concepts, ensuring understanding of hazards and their controls, and promoting good work practices. Training must occur before any work begins and follow all OSHA rules and regulations. Additional or refresher training should be provided if an accident occurs on the job or when improper use of equipment or unsafe work practices are observed.

Documentation, documentation, documentation

Documentation of training is a requirement in many of the OSHA standards. According to OSHA, it is a good idea to keep a record of all safety and health training. Documentation can also supply an answer to one of the first questions an incident investigator will ask: "Did the employee receive adequate training to do the job?" Here are some areas you can focus on to ensure your documentation is complete:

- Have all employees sign an attendance record for all safety training sessions.
- Create job specific "on the job" training checklists to ensure all safety requirements are covered.
- Document your follow-up trainings and coaching opportunities related to safety training.

Minor worker restrictions

Employees under the age of 18 are considered minors in the state of Ohio and may have additional work restrictions that should be considered and discussed in your training. The following are some work activities that some minor employees are prohibited from performing. You should discuss these and any other prohibited work activities with your minor employees prior to the start of their work:

- Operation of power-driven circular saws, band saws, and guillotine shears.
- Use of power-driven woodworking machines.
- Use of power-driven and hoisting apparatus.
- Use of power-driven metal forming, punching, and shearing machines.
- Roofing operations.

A full listing of these restrictions can be found in the [Ohio Revised Code, Chapter 4109](#) and [Ohio Administrative Code, 4101:9-2](#).

**Note: Certain exceptions to these restrictions may apply to minor students enrolled in a bona fide educational program or working for an employer participating in the Ohio Manufacturing Mentorship Program, pursuant to section 4109.22 of the Ohio Revised Code.*

Peer pressure and workplace distractions

Workplace distractions and peer pressure can also have a direct effect on workplace injuries. Young workers are particularly susceptible to this concern and this brings about another great opportunity for training of staff. The demands of getting a job done quickly can result in a workplace injury because shortcuts are taken or attention to safety protocols are ignored to meet deadlines. This can result from a demand on production over safety or a young worker feeling the need to keep up with a veteran worker. Setting expectations of workplace goals and emphasizing workplace safety will go a long way. How employees react to distractions and peer pressure has a direct impact from your company's safety culture.

Technology also has an impact on distractions in the workplace, especially with young workers. How are your technology policies and expectations affecting your workers? Setting clear expectations about the use of cell phones and other technology that may create distractions in the workplace and coaching young workers on those expectations can help reduce workplace injuries.

Conclusion

By using the information in this safety talk, young workers will gain knowledge and skills required to ensure good work practices are established. Knowledge in hazard recognition, adequate training, minor work restrictions, and workplace distractions will help instill good work practices which they will take with them throughout their careers.

Group activity

Utilize the [attached tool](#) as a reference to identify areas in need of improvement. The tool provides several additional resources which can be used as needed.

Next, ask your younger workforce:

1. What hazards in our workplace do you believe pose the biggest risks to our employees?
2. To the best of your knowledge, what is the company currently doing to address those concerns?
3. What can we do additionally to our current processes to enhance your safety?

Resources

[Ohio BWC, Youth safety resources toolkit](#)

[BWC Learning Center](#), search for: Young Worker Safety (Online). There are 6 modules available.