

**WORKERS' COMPENSATION BOARD  
REPORT ON FOCUS GROUP  
RESEARCH FOR 2002  
YOUNG WORKER INITIATIVES**

**Prepared for:  
Prevention Division,  
Workers' Compensation Board**

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**December 2001**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite an improving trend, British Columbia’s Young Workers (YW) – those between the age of 15 and 24 – continue to have a higher rate of injury than workers as a whole. For this reason, the Workers’ Compensation Board of British Columbia (WCB) has made young worker health and safety a major strategic priority. Previous research has determined that preventing and reducing young worker injuries will require multi-stakeholder involvement, as well as careful research in planning and implementing programs so they meet audience needs and motivate change.

Accordingly, in the Fall of 2001, the WCB Prevention Services Division engaged the services of Context Research Ltd. to organize, design, facilitate and report on focus groups with eight key young worker stakeholder groupings. The purpose of the focus groups was to test and gain input to a number of young worker initiatives under development and proposed for 2002 and beyond, including:

- Information for supervisors of young workers
- Development of a web site for and about young workers
- Information/outreach to parents of young workers
- Development of a WorkSafe Certificate program
- Ongoing survey research of young workers and adults

The focus groups were held during a four-week period in mid-November through mid-December. Participants were recruited through a variety of mechanisms including WCB contact lists, industry and labour organizations, employers, and schools. The range of groups and the specific topics tested with each group are summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Testing of Young Worker Programs/Initiatives by Focus Group

PROGRAM/ INITIATIVE	YW 15-19	Industry	Supervisors	Parents	YW 20-24	Labour	Educators	Admin-istrators
Supervisory Program		✓	✓					
YW Web Site	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Parent Program				✓		✓	✓	✓
WorkSafe Certificate	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Survey Card	✓			✓	✓			

## **KEY FINDINGS**

### **1. Supervisor Program**

Focus group research conducted in 2000 determined that the person a young worker is most likely to rely upon for training and direction concerning health and safety is their immediate supervisor. Yet many supervisors are the same age or not much older than the youth they oversee, and their own knowledge of and training in workplace safety and supervision skills may be limited. The WCB has therefore included as a priority for 2002 a program to reach and support supervisors of young workers. The focus group discussion was designed to understand the kind of information supervisors most need and how that information can best be delivered.

Given that only two or three of the twelve participants at the supervisors' focus group had received any additional training on being promoted to a supervisory level, all welcomed the idea of support with health and safety. The consensus was that health and safety workshops and seminars would be the best form of support because classroom settings provide the most efficient and effective way for supervisors to learn and retain information. They said being with others gives opportunities for interaction, sharing of experiences, and chances to deal with real-life examples – all factors that increase the relevance of the information.

On-line courses were seen as a poor substitute for classroom training except as an alternative those unable to attend for course, a supplement to classroom training, or a means for receiving information updates. Interest in the concept of a Level 2 WorkSafe Certificate for Supervisors was strong; all the supervisors said they would take such a program on their own time, and nine said they would pay up to \$50.

With examples and probing, supervisors warmed to the idea of print information as a useful form of support on health and safety issues. The keys to its usefulness would be relevance to supervisors' needs, industry-specific examples, and timely, emerging issue. Desired content included:

- Real-life situations the supervisors encounter on the job
- Best practises in their industries
- Specific hazards and injuries
- Practical tools such as a checklist for running a health and safety meeting

Design features that would engage this target audience included:

- Highly visual material e.g. photographs, simple charts, other graphics

- Shorter, more frequent material such as a one-page newsletter with a topic or theme of the month

Supervisors thought they would best be reached through television ads or feature stories, direct mail (perhaps through their industry association or employer), or email.

The focus group results suggested a strong level of motivation and desire for information on the part of at least some segment of the young worker supervisor population. Working with supervisors on the content and design of information materials and courses would help ensure the product meets the desire.

## **2. Young Worker Web Site**

The WCB has identified a web site for and about Young Workers as the next phase of its Online Health and Safety Centre. Feedback received from users of the Online Centre has been positive, but the WCB believes that to be useful and engaging to the various young worker stakeholders, the Online Centre will need to either link to a separate site or page specific to young worker issues. Given the limitless number of web sites competing for users' time, it was crucial to test and identify various themes, ideas, content and design issues that will help to draw YW stakeholders to the new site/page and, once drawn in, to keep them there and encourage them to return.

### *The First Challenge – Getting People to the Site*

As earlier research ascertained, workplace health and safety is not a top-of-mind issue for most young worker stakeholders, so there is currently little demand for a web site for and about young workers. However, once focus groups participants reviewed the existing Online Health and Safety Centre or a draft Young Worker site, about two-thirds said they were somewhat to very likely to visit the site again, *even though* their comments about it were mixed. This suggests that if the WCB continues its efforts to raise awareness about the seriousness of young worker injury rates, *and* skilfully promotes a well-designed young worker web site, the site could become a useful one-stop information service for post-aware stakeholders.

The audience that may be the most difficult to engage is a sub-group of young workers themselves, 15 to 19 year-olds. They are far less likely than their older cohorts to be concerned about workplace safety or to see themselves as being vulnerable to injury. Nor are they frequent users of the worldwide web other than for entertainment, email, and games. This group suggested that mandatory school assignments would be the best way to get them to a young worker web site.

### *The Second Challenge – Keeping People at the Site*

All participants believed the young worker site should be a link off the main page of the Online Health and Safety Centre, and made numerous suggestions concerning design and content that

engage audiences, keep them there, and encourage them to return. These included: specific pages for specific audiences (e.g. young workers themselves, supervisors of young workers, parent, educators); interactive elements such as quizzes, games, and questions/answers; highly graphic elements such as photos, video clips, colour, moving icons; industry-specific information; and anecdotal stories. Web access is far from universal in schools and workplaces, but becoming widely available at home.

Additional testing with stakeholders may be valuable as the young worker web site moves into more detailed stages of development.

### **3. Parent Program**

Parents are an important stakeholder in young worker issues because once they are *aware* of the high injury rates, particularly in the three highest risk sectors to youth – restaurant, retail, and supermarket – they can be highly motivated to do something to help. However, they do not know what to do or say. A demand exists then, and can be increased through awareness building, for parent-specific information concerning young worker health and safety.

Such information would need to include catalysts so that parents can broach the topic with their children (especially teens), who may be reluctant to talk about their workplace for fear of getting into trouble or losing their job. Parents suggested that effective catalysts might be television or newspaper feature stories/ads, especially if they ran as a series. With a way to engage with their child, parents could then call on a print resource to guide them in what to talk about in more detail. Useful topics would be:

- Hints on how to talk about workplace safety
- Industry-specific questions to ask
- Checklist of safety practises and equipment in specific industries
- Injured young workers' stories
- A few key statistics
- A telephone resource number and resource listing

The parents said good ways to reach them with print information would be through direct mail from their child's school, or information requiring parents' sign-off prior to a child's work experience placement or *Take Your Child to Work Day*<sup>TM</sup> experience. Information meetings and safety workshops sponsored by Parent Advisory Councils would reach some, but not most parents, and brochures at places parents frequent would also have some reach (e.g. community centres, on buses, at Doctors' offices, liquor stores, gas stations).

The WCB may work on parent information in partnership with the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, which has expressed an interest in this role.

#### **4. WorkSafe Certificate Program**

The WCB is assessing the feasibility and desirability of taking the well-received Student WorkSafe program to another level – a level that includes certification. A WorkSafe Certificate program would more than likely have application in the school system, but is intended to have broader reach throughout the community to young and new workers. Given its importance and potential reach, the WorkSafe Certificate program was tested in all eight of the focus groups.

Save for one exception, the concept of a WorkSafe Certificate Program received an enthusiastically positive response at the focus groups. Industry said it would make good sense to hire certificate holders because it would reduce the number of cost and injuries. Parents liked the idea of consistency and standards in workplace training. Young workers, supervisors, and educators saw the certificate as a potential resume builder.

The general consensus was that buy-in from industry would be the key success criterion for the certificate. Young workers said they would only be interested in taking a program if it in fact enhanced their employability. One-third of the labour representatives, however, were strongly opposed to a certificate program because they felt it would take the responsibility for workplace safety training away from employers. For their part, the industry representatives said they would not reduce their own safety training at all if new workers held a certificate. Labour opponents had additional concerns such as a certificate inferring that workplace safety training is a “one-off” effort rather than an ongoing commitment, about the relevance and applicability of curriculum, and about what a pass or fail implies. These issues will need to be further discussed with labour representatives.

Opinion varied amongst groups about whether a certificate program should be mandatory or optional. Educators, young workers, and half of parents favoured universal access to the program. However, they also saw the potential for the certificate to be devalued in the marketplace if everyone held one. Industry representatives felt it was best to rely on the power of the job market to create demand for the program. Several people said that given two equally qualified candidates, they would hire the young person with a WorkSafe Certificate.

If a program were to be mandatory, schools seemed to be the logical location for the certificate program, but schools and districts are very much strapped for cash. Administrators and educators said that given the funding situation, there would be very little take-up of the program in schools unless extra funding was provided. This group was reluctant to introduce a fee-paying course. The WCB may need to discuss funding issues with the Ministry of Education before proceeding with further planning on the Certificate

program. Other options for delivery that were suggested included industry associations, labour organizations, community colleges, employment centres, and community centres.

The willingness to pay for a course varied amongst the groups, but overall the tolerance limit appeared to be \$25. If the certificate were in demand by employers, individuals' willingness to pay would increase substantially. Since industry buy-in was deemed to be the key driver for success, the WCB might want to consider involving industry representatives in the development and delivery of a WorkSafe Certificate program. Classroom-based training was strongly preferred over an internet-based course; the latter was seen as a "fallback" or supplement.

## **5. Survey**

In order to continue capturing data concerning Young Worker issues, the WCB is developing an instrument for surveying both youth and adults at venues where large numbers present – such as health and safety conferences and the annual Young Worker launch. Drafts of the youth survey were tested at the two young worker focus groups and a draft of the adult card with the parents' focus group. Participants were asked to complete as much of the survey as possible within approximately five minutes, and to note any questions they found unclear or confusing as they went along.

Feedback indicated that as far as the wording of the questions is concerned, the WCB is on the right track. Participants in all the focus groups found the survey easy to complete and had no difficulty understanding the questions. However, the likelihood that people would complete the survey varied between youth and adults. Youth said that if they were approached at a mall or an event to complete it, its length would put them off. By contrast, the length was not of concern to the parent group. Both audiences said a more inviting layout (e.g. reduced number of pages, use of stronger and more engaging fonts, colour, a booklet format) might encourage a greater rate of completion.

## **6. Other Issues**

During the focus group discussions, other peripheral but important issues emerged with relevance to the young worker initiative. Industry representatives and supervisors advised that they currently perceive their relationship with the WCB as being primarily adversarial. They said the climate does not yet exist, though they believe it should, for a collaborative relationship, where WCB officers and industry share in acknowledging good health and safety practises already in place, and ideas for practical solutions for improvements. Right now, they said, the WCB is perceived as an "enforcer" rather than a partner, and they would not seek out advice or support from the Board for this reason. A cause for some optimism, however, was the acknowledgement that the Board and industry are working together much more than in the past through various industry associations.

## **7. Conclusion**

The focus group research has provided the WCB with a significant amount of practical information on what may and may not work in reaching target audiences with its young worker initiatives. This information will be helpful in directing the development and implementation phases of the supervisor program, young worker web site, parent program, WorkSafe Certificate, and survey programs, and in greatly enhancing the potential for these combined initiatives to translate into fewer young worker claims and lowered injury rates.