

Research in action

With three research competitions now complete, a variety of projects are underway and making significant progress towards their goal of advancing knowledge to improve occupational health and safety in B.C. Over the course of 2004, many of these projects are expected to wrap up and begin reporting final results.

Investigating the consequences of young worker injuries

British Columbia has more than a quarter of a million young workers (aged 15 to 24) and they are at a greater risk than any other age group for being injured on the job. Although the latest statistics show that young worker injuries and fatalities are on the decline, last year alone an average of 170 young workers were injured on the

job each work week.

To better understand the issue, Dr. Mieke Koehoorn, assistant

professor at the University of British Columbia's Department of Health Care and Epidemiology, is conducting a study to examine the experience of young workers in B.C. and to evaluate the long-term health consequences of being injured on the job at a young age. Her interest in the topic stems partly from her concern for her nieces and nephews as they enter the workforce.

"When teenagers like my young nieces and nephews head out with their friends, we usually ask what they'll be doing, where they'll be going, and who will be supervising them," she says. "But when those same teenagers start working, we focus on advice about working hard and doing what they're told. It's assumed that someone in the workplace will be looking out for them, and that he or she will come home safe."

Koehoorn's project, which received funding in the 2001-2002 research competition, is looking at health care outcomes among a group of 427,288 young people, and comparing those who have experienced an injury on the job with those who have not. The goal is to demonstrate the long-term health consequences of being injured on the job at a young age.



Dr. Mieke Koehoorn's research is exploring the long-term health consequences of being injured on the job at a young age.

According to Koehoorn, the research is not without its challenges. "Young workers are a highly mobile group, and historical data are hard to find. Unfortunately, the statistics we do have show that young workers face a higher risk of injury than older workers and an injury early in life may result in a significant long-term increase in health service needs."

When completed at the end of 2004, the results of Koehoorn's study will be shared with a broad group of employers, educators, and other key stakeholders to raise awareness and encourage more focus on young worker safety. "I hope that by drawing attention to this important issue and increasing awareness around the lifetime consequences of young worker injuries, more resources and targeted prevention programs will be delivered to B.C.'s youth," she says.