

Young Workers in the Film Industry

In the next hour in British Columbia at least one worker between the ages of 15 and 25 will get injured on the job. Young and new workers are more vulnerable to injury than more seasoned veterans. They lack the experience, training and confidence of older workers. They are unaware of the risks and are reluctant to appear inexperienced or to 'rock the boat' by asking questions.



dehydration, hypothermia, sunstroke, lower back injuries and careless lifting, and accidents caused by low light conditions in the studio.

ACFC West is the Association of Canadian Film Craftspeople, is a technical film union with occupations from accountants to animal wranglers. ACFC includes a wide variety of trades including construction, make-up and special effects. ACFC requires applicants to have WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) training and Set Etiquette, in addition to prior experience working on set³. First Aid is recommended and reimbursed. Chief Steward, Jarrod Thalheimer, estimates that a large percentage of Trainees and about 600 of the 3000 members of ACFC are under the age of 25. ACFC includes in their union contract: if you believe your situation to be unsafe and dangerous you have the right to refusal; underscoring their commitment to a safe working environment. Jarrod indicated that some of the biggest hazards to young workers were thinking you know more than you actually do, bravado, fear of looking dumb, want to impress, and lack of experience. The film industry can put a considerable amount of ready cash in the hands of young workers. Some of the accompanying challenges facing young film industry workers are problems with drugs and alcoholism. The long hours required can put a strain on personal relationships. Jarrod mentioned that the most successful workers are able to maintain a balance in their lives through stress management, good financial planning, and being able to say no to work so they can stay connected with their loved ones.

IATSE Local 891 is a key motion picture technicians union. IATSE 891 has 7635 active members, with just 94 under the age of 25. They have 7099 permittees, with 375 under 25. IATSE 891 encourages their members to obtain safety training. Their workers are some of the most experienced in the industry. Requirements vary for each occupation⁴. Nina Roesler, IA891's Occupational Safety and Health Assistant comments that it is the responsibility of employers to promote safe work practices and young workers, in particular, benefit from well developed and maintained safety culture.

On the other side of the camera, we talked to the **Union of British Columbia Performers/ACTRA (UBCP)**⁵. UBCP are the working actors of the film industry, and some of their members are well under the age of 15. UBCP has about 5500 members. There are 428 UBCP members and 463 apprentices under 25. Fred Keating,

UBCP member, is a well respected actor and long time participant in SHAPE's motion picture standing committee. Fred said that although, to his knowledge, there is no formal safety training for young actors at UBCP [Ed: *SHAPE delivers introduction safety talks during UBCP orientation and members are encouraged to take set etiquette*], there are many well-informed staff to let parents and young workers know the rights and obligations of both performers and production companies on set. The biggest hazards, challenges and dangers on set are about the same for youngsters as adults: cables, sets under construction, slippery or wet conditions on set or at the circus [Ed: *grouping of the actors trailers*], and remembering it can be like walking through a construction site at the best of times. Most parents and production companies ensure a child's safety by ensuring they are always accompanied by an adult ... either from the family or the production. If parents, guardians or the young worker require information about the protective policies of the government, union and production company some sources prior to production include the agent, various acting instructors, the union staff, other children or parents who have been involved in the past and, once on set, the hierarchy is pretty straightforward.

Best advice for a young person on set? Don't go anywhere alone and if you do, always tell a responsible adult where you're going and when you intend to return and like any other wilderness expedition ... don't change the plan. Don't vary your route. Do what you need to do. Return. And tell your responsible adult that you are back. Report any small accident or injury. No one will blame you. They just want to make it better. Jody Kiceluk, UBCP Film & TV Representative, added that the film industry is exceptional in that it employs minors. Care must be taken so children have appropriate working hours, education, naptime and socializing. Privacy levels are important for young children, as are separate and adequate facilities for both genders. [Ed: *SHAPE is currently working on guidelines for infant and child workers in film*]

Teamsters 155⁶ are a union of drivers, catering, security, animal trainers, handlers and wranglers, car wranglers, mechanics, body persons, safety divers and marine coordinators. Their current membership is

The following are statistics from the Workers Compensation Board of British Columbia¹ for 2002:

■ 34 workers between the ages of 15 and 24 were injured in the workplace every working day

■ Five young workers were permanently disabled in workplace accidents each week

■ Tragically, five young workers were killed on the job.

SHAPE talked with some key unions and associations in the film industry about young workers. We wanted to know how many young people are working in film and what systems are in place to help guide them through their first days, weeks and years on the job.

The **Directors Guild of Canada (DGC BC)** members are the creative and logistics personnel of the film industry. DGC members include a variety of professions from traffic controllers to locations managers; production office staff to directors. The DGC is often a starting point for those who want to work in film. Shirley Gentner, Operations Manager, from the DGC BC estimates that about 25% of those with full membership are under the age of 25. This number jumps to 85% for production assistants, the entry level position to the Guild. Joining the DGC means completing a highly structured apprenticeship program². Safety and production orientation courses are a requirement for membership and the Directors Guild is one of the most pro-active organizations in this regard. The DGC membership was instrumental in putting the apprenticeship program in place in response to the rapid growth of the film industry in BC. Kendrie Upton and Catou Kearney, both Location Managers with the DGC, said that common hazards for young workers in film included; wearing open toed or less than adequate footwear (e.g. sandals), fatigue,

Hearing Loss in Young Workers in Performing Arts Industries & Film Production

Prepared by Stephanie L. McLeod, ABLE Mobile Hearing

887; with 421 registered permittees [Ed: no stats for under 25 available at printing]. There is no trainee designation. Michael Evans, Recording Secretary, Senior Dispatcher told SHAPE that every permittee in the drivers division is required to do a re-certification of their licence. The Teamsters train their members in the transportation of dangerous goods and in the operation of various machinery such as fork-lifts, elevated work platforms and lifting devices. The greatest hazard in any work environment is haste. Best advice to new members is that "haste may not make waste but it always creates risk". Fortunately most of the individuals who come to Local 155 have been in the work force for sometime. As a rule, they have learned the basics before they land on our doorstep. But the advice remains the same, don't get stamped.

The film industry faces both unique and similar challenges of other industries. A fast growing workforce has given rise to policies, training and systems to give young and new workers the skill set necessary to have safe, healthy and long careers. This in part was the genesis of SHAPE. For more information about these policies and requirements please refer to the individual unions and associations (See resources below). To contact SHAPE about safety training and other resources phone 604-733-4682 or to reach our dedicated health and safety consultant Marty Clausen phone 604-765-0791.

Resources:

1. **WCB of BC** Young Workers
<http://youngworker.healthandsafetycentre.org/s/WCBInitiatives-AwarenessCampaigns.asp?ReportID=30313>
2. For **DGC of BC** information
www.dgcbc.com tel: 604-688-2976
3. For **ACFC West** information
www.acfcwest.com tel: 604-299-2232
4. **IATSE Local 891** information
www.iatse.com tel: 604-664-8910
5. **UBCP** information
www.ubcponline.com tel: 604-689-0727
6. **Teamsters 155** information
www.teamsters155.org tel: 604-876-8898

In 2002, ABLE Mobile Hearing conducted over 225 tests for industry workers under the age of 30. Results show that 18% of those tested for the first time had already experienced a loss in their hearing due to exposure to excessive sound levels. Equally alarming is the statistic that only 43% of the workers under the age of 30 were regularly wearing hearing protection devices when working in excessive sound levels. The technical term for this kind of hearing loss is *Noise-Induced Hearing Loss*, even though it might be caused by excessive sound levels of music or dialogue.

Noise-Induced Hearing Loss is a serious health concern. This kind of hearing loss is **permanent** and **irreversible**. Usually, by the time you notice that you have a problem, it's too late – you have already lost some of your hearing. A person suffering from Noise-Induced Hearing Loss will begin to experience difficulty distinguishing words and sounds, particularly when there is background noise (such as at social functions, parties, etc.) You start missing out on conversations. All of a sudden, this hearing loss not only affects your health; it affects your social life, too!

The good news is that with proper hearing protection, Noise-Induced Hearing Loss is 100% preventable. Even if you already suffer from a Noise-Induced Hearing Loss, it is just as important to protect and conserve the hearing you have left. Always wear your hearing protection when in excessive sound levels, both on and off the job.

How do you know if you are working in sound levels that are hazardous to your health?

Research indicates that consistent exposure to sound levels of 85 dB or greater will damage your hearing. If you don't know the noise levels in your workplace, try this test: Stand at arm's length from a co-worker. If you have to raise your voice to carry on a conversation, you are most likely in sound that equals or exceeds 85 dB. Time to wear your hearing protection!

Think you're too young to lose your hearing?

Statistics indicate otherwise! Remember, 18% of the workers under 30 we test have already lost some hearing due to noise. Your hearing is too important to lose. Always wear your hearing protection when in excessive sound levels, both on and off the job. There are so many styles and models of hearing protection available now; there is something suitable for everyone's needs. [Ed: please contact SHAPE for more information about the right hearing protection suitable for your professional and exposure levels. 604-733-4682]

Make sure your annual hearing test is up-to-date for WCB records. If you ever suffer a loss due to exposure during work, you may be eligible to advance a claim. Musicians and dancers are covered under the WCB in British Columbia. Call ABLE Mobile Hearing at 604-277-3753 to arrange hearing tests for your workplace.

NewMusicWest Free Hearing Testing



This year was very successful. After three years of providing hearing testing to NewMusicWest, the word is out to the music community and there seems to be an increased interest in hearing conservation. Twenty-two music industry workers were tested by Richard of Able Mobile Hearing. The hearing testing booked up within the first hour. Apologies to those who could not take advantage of this opportunity. If you would like more information please contact SHAPE: 604-733-4682 email: robync@shape.bc.ca or contact Able Mobile Hearing (see above article).