

YOUNG WORKER PROGRAM

Why focus on young workers?

There are more than a quarter million young workers in British Columbia who, like all workers, have a right to a safe and healthy workplace. Young workers, particularly male young workers, are at a much higher risk of injury than other workers. More than half of workplace accidents involving workers aged 15 to 24 happen during the first six months on a job, with almost 20 per cent occurring during the first month.

Without the knowledge and experience of older workers, it's more difficult for youth to recognize potentially risky situations and equipment. Eager to please and unwilling to make waves, young workers may be hesitant to question the safety of work procedures or ask for proper safety training. Many feel pressured to complete a job quickly and can be swayed by peer pressure, regardless of the risk involved.

A sense of invincibility and confidence makes it easier for employers to assign dangerous tasks to young workers. And without a thorough understanding of their rights or responsibilities as workers, youth may be reluctant to ask questions or refuse to perform an unsafe work practice.

How frequently are young workers hurt on the job?

- Each day in B.C., 36 young workers are hurt on the job or one every 40 minutes.
- Every week, five of these young workers are permanently disabled in workplace accidents.
- Workers between the ages of 15 and 24 reported 8,962 workplace injury claims in 2003. Many more go unreported.
- In 2003, nine young workers were killed in work related accidents.

How did the nine young workers die in 2003?

		Gender	
		M	F
Motor vehicle accident	5	3	2
Industrial accident - Construction	1	1	
Industrial accident - Sawmill	1		1
Industrial accident - Dairy farming	1	1	
Industrial accident - Aviation	1	1	

In what industries are most young workers injured?

Industries with high young worker claim counts, costs, and duration receive special attention from WCB. For 2004, WCB is looking specifically at **Retail/Hospitality** (notably restaurants, general retail, supermarkets and department stores), **Manufacturing** (notably wooden truss manufacture and fish processing/reduction), **Forestry** (notably cable or hi-lead logging, helicopter logging, shake block cutting and integrated logging) and **Agriculture** (notably ranching).

What are the most dangerous tasks for young workers?

1. Lifting objects as retail clerks, shipper-receivers, labourers, material handlers in a number of industries.
2. Working on ladders, stairs, scaffolding, other raised areas in any industry.
3. Using knives in food service, retail sales, and supermarkets.
4. Working with hot substances or equipment in restaurants.
5. Driving or riding in vehicles and operating or working near mobile equipment in any industry

6. Operating food slicers in restaurants, supermarkets as deli sales clerks, cooks, food service helpers/preparers and retail sales clerks.
7. Working near running equipment or machinery.

Are young workers injured more often than older workers?

Males under the age of 25 are at the highest risk for a workplace injury in B.C. – seven out of every 10 young worker claims are for young males. The injury rate for young male workers is almost 70 per cent higher than the overall injury rate in B.C. This means about one of every 20 working young males are hurt on the job in our province.

Young women are injured on the job much less frequently than young men – one in 59 young female workers was injured on the job last year. Partial reason for the difference is that young males tend to work in areas where there are more hazards.

Who is responsible for young worker safety?

Anyone involved with young workers has a stake in promoting a safe and healthy work environment. Employers, supervisors, unions, educators, parents, community groups and young workers themselves must share in the responsibility. As the most vulnerable members of our workforce, young workers need extra support in making safe and healthy choices on the job. Like all workers, they need to understand their rights and responsibilities in the workplace.

What specific initiatives are being undertaken by the WCB to reduce and prevent young worker injuries?

- Develop strategic partnerships and activities with existing health and safety associations and/or employers and workers in the sectors with high young worker injury rates/claims
- Continue to build industry and community awareness and support for young worker health and safety issues and initiatives
- Promote ongoing research with young people and stakeholders on why and how young workers are injured on the job and what can and should be done to reduce the risks young workers face
- Update Student WorkSafe program for kindergarten to grade 12 to meet new Ministry of Education graduation requirement programs (Planning 10, Work Experience and Grad portfolios) and revised curriculum plans
- Expand Student WorkSafe into community and youth employment agencies and groups
- Develop new learning resources for young and new workers such as interactive on-line education resources
- Promote development of young/new worker sector training programs by industry
- Conduct outreach activities to small business owners and operators
- Build on stakeholder partnerships by establishing a young worker advisory group
- Expand education resources for parents and educators
- Conduct and sponsor youth forums and youth to youth initiatives

What resources are available to young workers?

- **Prevention Information Line**

The WCB offers support for workers, employers and others who have questions or concerns about occupational safety and health. The Prevention Information Line at (604) 276-3100 or toll-free in B.C. at

1 888 621-SAFE (7233) can provide information on safety and health, or is available to report concerns anonymously.

- **WCB Website**

We have developed a comprehensive web site dedicated exclusively to the safety of young workers. It includes a broad range of information for youth, parents, educators, employers and other stakeholders. You can access it by following the links from the WCB web site at www.worksafebc.com or directly at <http://youngworker.healthandsafetycentre.org>