

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 occur 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?

Far too often. Here are the facts:

- Every hour in B.C., two young workers are injured. Each day, 42 young workers are hurt on the job.
- Every week, five of these workers are permanently disabled in workplace accidents.
- Workers between the ages of 15 and 24 reported more than 10,500 workplace injuries in 2001. Many more go unreported.
- In 2001, five young male workers were killed in work related accidents – or one young male worker died on the job nearly every two months last year.

Are young workers injured more often than older workers?

Sadly, yes. 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 about 43 per cent higher than the overall injury rate in B.C. This means about one of every 19 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 50 young females was injured on the job last year. One reason for the difference is that young males tend to work in areas where there are more hazards. Also, in 2002 the number of employed young males is increasing at a more rapid pace than that of females.

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.

In what industries are most young workers injured?

In B.C. most injuries to young workers occur in the restaurant/hospitality industry. Claims by young workers in the retail sector are second with more than 40 per cent of those claims coming from supermarket employees. Construction and manufacturing are also high sources of young worker claims across the province.

What specific initiatives are being undertaken by the WCB to reduce the injury rate of young workers?

- Partnerships with existing health and safety associations and/or employers and workers in the three sectors where young worker claims are the highest: restaurants, supermarkets, and general retail outlets.
- Province-wide campaigns including the annual summer awareness program and year-round outreach activities such as Student WorkSafe, an education program from kindergarten to grade 12. Other initiatives include:
- injured young workers speaking to schools, industry, labour, community and youth groups
- partnering with stakeholder groups like provincial associations for parent advisory committees and principals/vice-principals to present programs such as a parent education and outreach workshops, a conference and regional youth forums all focusing on young worker health and safety
- piloting a peer-to-peer program to develop a theatrical performance on young worker health and safety to be performed across B.C.

What resources are available to young workers?

- **Prevention Information Line**

The WCB offers support for workers and employers 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**

For further information, to order materials or to link to the Student WorkSafe page, visit WorkSafe online at www.worksafebc.com.

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For more information, please contact:

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