

## RETAIL INDUSTRY AND WCB PARTNER TO REDUCE INJURIES TO YOUNG WORKERS

**RICHMOND, BC, May 29, 2002** – Today, at the launch of the 8<sup>th</sup> annual safety awareness campaign Retail BC, Retail Council of Canada and the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors joined the Workers’ Compensation Board to emphasize to their members and the public the unique safety needs of young workers. The Bay in downtown Vancouver hosted the launch with similar events occurring in their Kelowna and Victoria stores.

Speaking at the event, Mark Startup, President and CEO of Retail BC said, “The retail sector is the place where many young people have their first jobs. The health and safety attitudes and habits they learn in these first workplaces will be carried through their working lives.”

Data released by the WCB showed that every hour in British Columbia two young workers are injured in workplace accidents. Last year in B.C. more than 10,500 young people were injured on the job and many more injuries went unreported. Every working day, 42 young workers are hurt on the job and every week, five of these workers are permanently injured. In 2001, five young workers were killed.

Almost 55,000 young workers were injured in BC from 1997 to 2001. The three industries where young workers are injured the most are also the three largest employers of young people - restaurants, supermarkets and general retail. The 2002 Young Worker awareness campaign is focussing on workers in the retail sector, which includes supermarkets, retail stores, and other general retail. Common injuries to young retail workers are musculoskeletal injuries, being struck by an object and falls.

While the claims data released show that the injury rate for young workers is now below the general provincial rate, young male workers aged 15 – 24 are still 60 per cent more likely to be injured on the job than any other age group.

Kevin Evans, Vice President, Western Canada of Retail Council of Canada stated, “Our members and their workers each have rights and responsibilities and need to understand the critical importance of doing the job safely – right from the beginning.”

At the launch, speaking on behalf of all injured young workers, Lauren Barwick told how on June 18, 2000, she became a paraplegic when she was struck by a hay bale while working on a horse ranch in Mission. She remembers the day vividly. “I couldn’t feel my legs,” she said. “I knew it was really serious because there was absolutely no feeling. I tried to move but couldn’t so I had to start screaming for help.”



“While we’re pleased to see a year-over-year reduction in the injury rate for young workers, we still have to be vigilant in making sure that young people are well trained and properly supervised when they enter the workplace.” said Roberta Ellis, Vice President of Prevention at the WCB. “Workplace safety is a shared responsibility – and all of us, workers, employers, supervisors, parents, educators, and unions must work together to sustain the improvements that are being made.”

As part of the launch, Ken Perry of Human Resources Development Canada spoke of the need for employers to respond to young people seeking summer employment and of the Hire-A-Student offices that have opened for the summer throughout the province.

The WCB has a wide range of resources and information available specifically created to help young people and their employers create safe workplaces. To order booklets, posters, reports or other information call Publications and Videos at the WCB at (604) 276-3068 or toll-free in BC at 1 800 661-2112, local 3068 or visit the Board’s website at [www.worksafebc.com](http://www.worksafebc.com).

Serving nearly two million workers and about 170,000 employers, the Workers’ Compensation Board is a statutory agency governed by a Panel of Administrators. The WCB is committed to a safe and healthy workplace and to providing return-to-work rehabilitation and fair compensation to workers injured and suffering occupational disease as a result of their employment.

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