

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 young male 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 is 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:

- Each day in B.C., 34 young workers are hurt on the job, or one every 42 minutes.
- Every week, five of these young workers are permanently disabled in workplace accidents.
- In 2002, five young male workers were killed in work related accidents.
- Workers between the ages of 15 and 24 reported 8,630 workplace injuries in 2002. Many more go unreported.

Is there a trend in young worker injuries?

While overall young worker injuries and fatalities are on the decline, serious injuries - permanent disabilities - such as amputations, broken backs and third degree burns are not.

	Fatals	Injuries per working day	Permanent disabilities per working week
1999	9	44	5
2000	6	44	5
2001	5	42	5
2002	5	34	5

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 from young males. The injury rate for young male workers is about 30 per cent higher than the overall injury rate in B.C. This means about one of every 21 working young males are hurt on the job in our province.

Young women are injured on the job far less frequently than young men – one in 63 young female workers 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 increased 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 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?

Industries with high young worker claim counts, costs and duration receive special attention from WCB. For 2003, WCB is looking specifically at **Retail/Hospitality** (Restaurants, General Retail, Supermarkets and Department stores), **Manufacturing** (Wooden truss manufacture and Fish processing/reduction), **Forestry** (Cable or hi-lead logging, Helicopter logging, Shake block cutting and Integrated logging) and **Agriculture** (Ranching).

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

- Partnerships with existing health and safety industry associations and/or employers and workers in the sectors with high young worker injury rates/claims
- 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
- Strategic partnerships in young worker education, training and best practices (i.e., Student WorkSafe, a comprehensive K-12 health and safety curriculum; a new Young Worker Certificate program; and Young Worker Safety Awards for youth and employers)
- Awareness initiatives with industry, labour, parents, educators, youth, government and community organizations (i.e., Annual safety awareness campaign; BC Student Voice forums; youth to youth theatre performance on young worker health and safety; presentations by injured young workers; new young worker video; parent resource materials and workshop)
- Multi-stakeholder initiatives including a Young Worker multi-stakeholder Steering Committee and Working Group with representatives from industry, organized labour, government, parents, educators, community groups and youth; Support/Advisory group for seriously injured young workers and their caregivers; and a Speakers Resource network of volunteer speakers

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.

- **<http://youngworker.healthandsafetycentre.org>**

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.

For more information, please contact:

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(604) 276-5159 or toll-free in B.C. at 1 888 621-7233, local 5077