

GETTING A JOB?

Ask questions about safety

A new job — especially your first one — can make you nervous. So you may not think to ask about safety at work. But you need to know about any workplace hazards to stay in one piece and collect your pay cheque — and eventually to grow into better jobs.

Every day, 34 young people are hurt at work in B.C. Five are permanently disabled each week. Most of this happens in what look like safe workplaces...restaurants and retail stores.

Your safety's definitely worth asking about, from the hiring interview and in every shift you work.

Smart employers care

Most bosses know that safety pays off. Accidents cause them a lot of trouble on top of the pain of someone who's hurt, and they appreciate it when a worker asks or tells them about safety hazards. They know good safety is good business, for everyone.

Questions for your interview

Here are some fair questions to ask someone you might work for. If the answers aren't clear, try to find out why. It can help you decide if you really want the job.

- √ Does the job involve any hazards, like working with chemicals, hot grease, high noise levels, or heavy equipment? If so, will I be trained in what to do to prevent injuries?
- √ Is there any safety gear I'll be expected to wear? If so, who provides it?
- √ What specific health and safety orientation will I get before starting work, and who's responsible for supervising me?
- √ What are my health-and-safety responsibilities, and who do I go to with safety concerns?
- √ If I'm hurt at work, what's the procedure? Who's the first aid person?

And after you're hired

Your boss can't read your mind, so always ask if you're not clear about doing something safely. Saying you're not sure or uncomfortable can be hard, even for experienced workers. But it's more than worth it to keep from getting hurt. Taking risks is dumb, and the smart employers know it. They'll respect you for asking. Think of supervisors as teachers who may like it when people recognize what they know. Use their experience to your advantage. Approach them respectfully; speak confidently, and say something like...

...I really like working with this equipment, but there's a lot to remember. Can you spare a few minutes to go over it again?

or

...I really think I've got the hang of this, but can you watch to make sure I'm doing everything right?

or

...I'm still not comfortable with this; would you explain it again?

If you don't feel safe

Your employer's legally responsible for putting safe work practices in place, and you're responsible for following them. If you have safety and health concerns, it's your responsibility to report them. Here's where to raise questions.

- 1: If a task feels unsafe, tell your immediate supervisor, and explain why you're not comfortable. In most cases, the issue will be resolved at this stage.
- 2: If you don't get a satisfactory answer from your immediate supervisor, or they're not available, go to their supervisor.
- 3: If you're still not satisfied, ask your safety representative, a member of the safety committee, or a shop steward.
- 4: Most problems are solved before getting to this stage, but your last resort is WorkSafeBC (the Workers' Compensation Board). Phone and explain your safety concerns (you can do it anonymously). Call 604 276-3100 in the Lower Mainland or toll-free to 1 888 621-7233.

Refusing unsafe work

If nothing else works, you have the legal right to refuse unsafe work. This is a tough thing to do, but it can be necessary. The good news is that most employers do listen when you talk about safety problems.

Still, if you run into one of the few who don't, remember that the law protects workers like you who report hazards or refuse unsafe work. It is against workers' compensation law for an employer to fire you or punish you in any way for refusing or reporting unsafe work to your supervisor — no matter where you work in B.C.

So don't doubt yourself. You can speak up for safety with some strength behind you. If you feel a task is dangerous, don't do it. And call WorkSafeBC if you need help.

Find out more

You can get more information on young worker safety from WorkSafeBC.

- Phone 604 231-8578 in the Lower Mainland, or toll-free elsewhere to 1 888 621-7233, ext. 8578.
- Fax 604 207-1478
- E-mail yworker@wcb.bc.ca
- Visit our web site at <http://youngworker.healthandsafetycentre.org/s/Home.asp>

