

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of June 4, 2012 – Young Workers

Memorial Day has always been known as the unofficial beginning of summer. This is typically the time when students and other young men and women enter the job market in the hopes of earning some money or to gain valuable experience or just to keep busy and stay out of trouble. Whatever the case, their first few days on the job place them in danger and make them extremely vulnerable to workplace accidents. In the rush and excitement to get that first job, young people are often eager to please while being unsure of the requirements and responsibilities of a safe and healthful work environment.

The category of *young worker* is defined as those workers in the 15 to 24 age group. Every year, young workers are injured, made ill, or killed on the job. Getting a full or part-time job shouldn't also come with the possibility of injury or death. Whether you will be working with a summer intern or your office will be setting up work stations for these eager beavers, we all need to pay extra attention.

Younger workers represent 14% of the U.S. labor force and face high risk for injury while on the job. To assess trends and help guide efforts to improve young worker safety, CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) analyzed data from the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) and the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System occupational supplement (NEISS-Work) for the period 1998--2007. During the 10-year period, 5,719 younger workers died from occupational injuries. The fatality rate for younger workers was 3.6 deaths per 100,000 full-time equivalent workers (FTE) (one FTE = 2,000 hours worked per year). For the same period, an estimated 7.9 million nonfatal injuries to younger workers were treated in U.S. hospital emergency departments. According to the CDC, public health, labor, and trade organizations should provide guidance to employers to help them in their responsibilities to provide safer workplaces and should identify steps that employers can take to remove or reduce injury hazards. Employers need to ensure that their younger workers have the requisite training and personal protective equipment to perform their jobs safely

How are young workers getting hurt? You name it, and it happens. Young workers are injured by slips and falls, by over exerting themselves, by objects that hit them, by exposure to hazardous chemicals, and by contact to hazardous materials. Young workers are also injured by powerful machines in which they haven't been properly trained to use or the equipment may not have guards to protect fingers and arms.

Top 5 causes of injury to young workers

- 1) Struck against, 2) Overexertion, 3) Falls, 4) Bodily reaction excluding overexertion and repetitive motion, 5) Caught in or compressed by equipment or objects

The most common injuries to young workers

Sprains and strains, loss of body part by amputation or avulsion, abrasions, blisters, contusions & fraction burns, fractures, chemical, electrical and heat burns

Young workers get injured or sick on the job for many reasons, including:

Unsafe equipment, inadequate safety training, inadequate supervision, dangerous work that is illegal or inappropriate for youth under 18, pressure to work faster, and stressful conditions

According to recent U. S. Department of Labor report, a large percentage of injuries in the workplace involve young and/or inexperienced workers with less than one year of experience on the job. More than half of these workers were employed for less than one month, and *one of every eight of these injuries occurred during the first day of work.*

The fact is, young workers have not yet had the experience or understanding of how accidents occur. They have never been educated about near-misses or accident precursors as well as the importance to not let a non-injury/illness incidents go unreported. We should understand that these are the very things that need to be captured so we can correct a potential hazardous situation before an unfortunate event occurs. They are inexperienced with the job tasks that they have been assigned while they are ready to take chances to prove their worth and ability; both to themselves and to their fellow workers and bosses. Therefore, it is up to us to let them know that we are not looking for heroes, while passing on our understanding and first-hand accounts on why safety and health needs to be the top concern when they are working out in the field. Young and inexperienced workers present a major challenge to managers and supervisors to ensure that these workers do not end up on the injury statistic list right from the start. True, first line supervisors have a direct responsibility to ensure safety and health at their job site, but that does not preclude the rest of us to take charge and help reduce the potential of injury for new and inexperienced workers.

Formal training is another aspect that cannot be overlooked; even though we may have an intern for only a few months, and therefore feel training is an investment that may be too costly or time-consuming, as we want to see a certain level of productivity within their limited employment period. These workers should be trained on the specific job function that they will perform. This training must include how to safely perform the job. The inexperienced worker needs training on personal protection, proper lifting, working with or around electricity, and slips and falls.

All this means is that we have a responsibility to watch out for young workers (as well as all our fellow-workers). When we hire a new, young and inexperienced person, we have the opportunity to teach them the practical aspects of our job; and that includes performing their assigned tasks safely.

We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand -

Randy Pausch. (American professor of computer science and human-computer interaction and design at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. – gone before his time)