By The Numbers: New-Young Worker Safety

DID YOU KNOW?

Young workers have high rates of job-related injury. These injuries are often the result of the many hazards present in the places they typically work, such as sharp knives and slippery floors in restaurants. Limited or no prior work experience and a lack of safety training also contribute to high injury rates. Middle and high school workers may be at increased risk for injury since they may not have the strength or cognitive ability needed to perform certain job duties.

Fast Stats:

- In 2018, there were about 19.4 million workers under the age of 24. These workers represented 12% of the total workforce1.
- In 2017, 377 workers under the age of 24 died from work-related injuries2.
- In 2017, there were 22 deaths to workers under 18 years of age2.
- In 2017, the incidence rate for non-fatal injuries for workers, ages 16–19, was 112.1 per 10,000 full-time employees (FTE) and 96.3 per 10,000 FTE for workers, ages 20–243.
- In 2017, the rate of work-related injuries treated in emergency departments for workers, ages 15–19, was 1.25 times greater than the rate for workers 25 years of age and older4.

Workers new to a job are three times more likely to be injured during the first month on the job than more experienced workers.

“Young workers” are under the age of 25. “New workers” can be of any age who are on the job for less than six months or who are assigned to a new job.

Between 2011 and 2015, 33 young workers aged 15 to 24 died in work-related incidents, according to Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) statistics. In 2015, five young workers died.

Between 2011 and 2015, the WSIB approved 31,689 lost-time claims from young workers. In 2015 alone, injuries to young workers resulted in more than 6,400 lost-time claims. More than 60 per cent (4,072) of those claims were from male workers.

In 2015, many of the injured young workers aged 15 to 19 years old were food counter attendants and kitchen helpers. Many of the injured young workers aged 20 to 24 years old were laborer's in processing, manufacturing and utilities.

Getting that first job is an exciting time. For the young worker, there's the euphoria of disposable income combined with the confidence boost of learning someone other than a family member or coach is willing to give them a chance. Nowhere on the radar are there thoughts of being injured, maimed, or even worse during that initial foray into the workforce. But grim statics show there's reason for concern. And it's the collective responsibility of all involved—employers, parents, educators, and the young workers—to take accountability to ensure that first job doesn't end in tragedy.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration views "young workers" as employees under the age of 25. Assistant Secretary of Labor Dr. David Michaels pointed out in a June 24, 2014, U.S. Department of Labor blog that young workers are twice as likely to be injured on the job as older workers. OSHA statistics also reveal that one teenaged worker is injured on the job every nine minutes. And when it comes to workplace fatalities, where even one is one too many, in 2014, 351 young workers were killed on the job, with 21 of the victims younger than 18.

Why are young workers so much more likely to be injured on the job? This question makes me reflect back on my workplace injuries. I've been injured to the point of needing emergency room treatment twice in the past 36 years, and both incidents occurred prior to

me turning 21. The first event required stitches after I took a rock to the head on an excavation work site. Hard hats were readily available and we were encouraged, but not required, to wear them. After the stitches, I was a hard hat convert. The second incident resulted in a tetanus shot. I stepped on a nail while assisting on a maintenance project at a manufacturing facility. From what I remember, safety footwear with puncture resistant midsoles was not worn; they were definitely not required at that facility.

It's almost that time of the year for high school and college students. School's out for the summer! While most would like to kick back and spend the summer at the beach, the reality is most youth will be entering the work force in full or part time positions. For many this may be their first job, some may have just finished their degree or diploma and finally able to work in their chosen field. In Alberta, youth, (ages 15-24) represent approximately 323, 300 workers in Alberta. Of all the Canadian provinces, Alberta had the second lowest youth unemployment rate at 10.7%. With all these young workers eagerly entering the workforce, it is important they are aware of the risk associated with employment and how they can prepare for a safe and long-lasting career!

More stats about youth workers:

- Workers with less experience are more likely to be injured than those with a year or more of experience?
- Over 50 per cent of all incidents involving young workers occur during their first six months on the job.
- Youth workers are 1/3rd more likely to get injured than those workers over 25
- Youth workers had the highest lost time and disabling injury frequency in 2015
- Males, age 15-24 you are more likely to get injured on the job than any other worker.

Why are young workers getting injured on the job?

While ALL workers are at risk for injuries on the job, here are

some reasons that explain why young workers are at a greater risk for injury at work:

- Lack of training and work experience
- Lack of confidence or understanding of their rights as workers
- Lack of preparation for the workplace
- Being given more dangerous jobs
- Feeling of invincibility
- Unwillingness to ask questions
- Being distracted and having other things on their mind