Look Out for New Workers

What’s at Stake?

You’ve likely heard the sports metaphors… “There is no I in team” … Sports has showed us that success is often generated by players working together for a common goal. And much like a team, you have veteran workers and rookies – either because of their age, their experience, in many cases, both. Veterans help the rookies learn the ropes in both sports and at work and the rookies will be watching you – what lessons are they learning?

What’s the Danger?

The workplace can be scary and full of unknown hazards for our rookie workers; full of strange equipment, unfamiliar chemicals, and complicated tasks. It’s likely they are trying to do as much as they can without asking for help – and this can often lead to mistakes, risky behavior, and injuries. Consider these real-life stories…

An 18-year-old worker died after becoming entangled in a portable mortar mixer at a residential construction site. The victim was cleaning the mixer at the end of his shift to prepare it for the following day. A painter working near the victim heard yells for help and saw the victim’s arm stuck in the machine and his body being pulled into the rotating mixer paddles. He ran to the mixer and attempted to turn it off but could not disengage the gears. EMS was called and responded within minutes, but he was pronounced dead at the scene.

A 17-year-old assistant pool manager was electrocuted when she contacted an ungrounded electric motor. She was adding soda ash to the water while standing barefoot on the wet concrete floor of the pump room. She filled the plastic drum with water, plugged in the mixing motor and placed the motor switch in the on position. In the process of adding soda ash to the drum, she accidentally

contacted the energized mixing motor with her left hand and created a path to ground for the electrical current. She was electrocuted and died.

A 20-year-old carpenter was working for a construction company that was building an apartment building. While he was trying to install temporary supports for the roof trusses, he fell through the second story stairway opening and landed on the first-floor concrete walkway. He suffered a skull fracture with serious brain injuries.

How to Protect Yourself

Here are 9 ways you can help new and younger workers settle in safely with their new environment:

1. Set a good example by following the safety rules and procedures you've been trained on.
2. Show them where to obtain safety materials and instructions.
3. If they aren't wearing the right PPE or wearing PPE in the right way, let them know and help them make it right.
4. Remind them where the emergency eyewash and safety shower are in your work area.
5. Help them find and read the Safety Data Sheets (SDS). It may be the first time they've ever had to work with them outside of their new hire training.
6. Point out the location of fire extinguishers, alarm boxes and other emergency equipment and first aid supplies.
7. They were likely told about injury reporting during their new hire training but may be fearful or embarrassed to report an injury. If you see a rookie worker get injured, or they tell you about a near miss or injury, encourage them to report it.
8. Lead by example and show them the importance of leaving machine guards in place to prevent accidental contact with moving equipment and stock.
9. Finally, if you see a new worker making a "rookie mistake" or any worker doing something unsafe, speak up.

Final Word

Your advice to a new co-worker is not a replacement for proper safety orientation, training and supervision. However, you can help make sure he or she picks up the information necessary to work safely, because working together safely is a team effort.