Seven Statistics on Literacy and Workplace Safety

Adults who struggle with reading have difficulty grasping workplace safety procedures, thereby putting themselves and others at risk for injury or illness. Here are seven statistics relating to low literacy and its effects in the workplace.

1. According to the US Department of Education, 21 percent of American adults read below a fifth-grade student level.
2. In Canada, 15 percent of adults have serious difficulty reading even basic material. And an additional 27 percent of Canadian adults have difficulty in learning new job skills because of limited comprehension of what they are reading. (ABC Life Literacy Canada)
3. Researchers in New Zealand found that of 466 workers studied, 65 percent overall could not fully understand written information about their employers' OHS policies and rules, hazard information and safety procedures. (Work base: The New Zealand Centre for Workforce Literacy Development)
4. A study released by the Conference Board of Canada found that while 64 percent of employers believed that their workers understood workplace health and safety practices, only 40 percent of workers interviewed agreed.
5. Three negative effects of low literacy are: increased risk for injury or death when signs and safety information cannot be fully understood; reduced productivity from skill deficits; and increased mistakes and wastage.
6. Literacy is measured on a scale of 1 to 5. Level 3, equivalent to high school graduation, is the level at which a person can cope with the demands of a knowledge-based economy and society. (International Survey of Reading Skills)
7. Five signs that your workers may be struggling are: being slow or unable to respond to changes in procedures; being reluctant to participate in team meetings; turning down promotion opportunities; making excuses such as "I forgot my

glasses” or “I’ll read it later”; and a tendency to call in sick when training sessions are taking place. (ABC Life Literacy Canada)

Adults with poor reading skills often have difficulty grasping workplace safety procedures, putting them at greater risk for making mistakes that can result in injuries, illnesses or even death. Here are seven statistics related to literacy and workplace safety: