Young Worker Safety and Health

What’s at Stake?

There are over 20 million workers younger than 24 years of age in the workplace and these workers represent roughly 15% of the workforce.

Young workers have high occupational injury rates which are in part explained by a high frequency of injury hazards in workplaces where they typically work, such as hazards in restaurant settings associated with slippery floors and the use of knives and cooking equipment. Inexperience and lack of safety training may also increase injury risks for young workers.

And, for the youngest workers, those in middle and high schools, there may be biologic and psychosocial contributors to increased injury rates, such as inadequate fit, strength, and cognitive abilities to operate farm equipment such as tractors.

What’s the Danger?

Most non-fatal injuries occur in the agriculture, forestry and fishing industries, followed by retail trade, construction and service industries (e.g. nursing homes, amusement parks and swimming pools). The most commonly reported incidents for injury include transportation, contact with objects/equipment, assaults and violent acts and exposure to harmful substances and environments.

Reasons for these incidents include:

- Insufficient safety training.
- Working with unsafe equipment.
- Poor supervision.
- Performing work that is illegal for young workers, such as operating certain types of equipment; and
- Being pressured to work quickly.

How to Protect Yourself

To protect young workers from harm:

- Comply with all federal and state child labor laws.
- Establish mentorships. Have experienced workers available so younger workers can better learn the ins and outs of a new job.
- Train young workers on proper work practices and how to spot hazards. Ensure training is done in an understandable way appropriate for the worker’s age.
- Create a culture in which young workers are encouraged to ask questions.
- Ensure young workers do not operate dangerous equipment; and
- Teach young workers what they should do if they get injured at work.

Final Word

Young workers have a unique role in our workforce. Help keep them safe by providing training and support that is unique to their needs.