

WorkCover NSW
Protecting Young Workers From Workplace Hazards



Young Workers. Safe Workers.





5

**most common injuries
to young workers**

1.

Sprains and strains

2.

Open wounds

3.

Fractures

4.

Bruising and crushing

5.

Burns





PROTECTING YOUNG WORKERS FROM WORKPLACE HAZARDS

Are you an employer of a young worker?

You should know that young workers must be protected from the risk of injury or illness arising from workplace hazards. Employers must pay special attention to the needs of young workers because they lack experience and may not be familiar with workplace procedures.

Employers must provide them with information and training about work hazards and safe work practices that gives consideration to their age and experience. As is the case with all workers, employers must also maintain safe equipment and a safe work environment.

This leaflet is particularly relevant to four types of young workers:

- Workers under 25 years

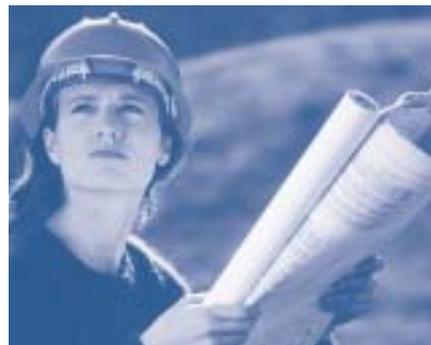
- School students who are working part time or in casual employment
- Students on a work placement who are spending time working as a part of a course they are doing
- Students on work experience.

Why do Young Workers Need Special Attention?

The statistics show a clear picture. Young workers, those between the ages of 15 and 25, are being hurt or killed on the job every day.

- In 1998/99, nine young workers were killed in New South Wales.
- More than 1,000 suffered a permanent disability.
- Over 8,400 young workers were injured at work. That's over 23 injured every day of the year!

Most injuries took place in the manufacturing and retail industries.



Young Workers. Safe Workers.

WILL THE YOUNG WORKERS YOU EMPLOY MAKE THE HEADLINES?

“Melinda burnt when OHS program fails”.

21 year old Melinda had only been with her employer, a fast food chain, for about five weeks.

Melinda was cleaning a bacon fryer and steamer unit. One compartment (the fryer) held hot cooking oil, while the other (the steamer) contained hot water. Melinda, through inexperience, mistakenly believed that both sections of the unit contained hot oil. She tried to find the oil drum into which to pour the oil to discard it later, but discovered that it was outside the premises with the back door locked. She then asked the cook and restaurant manager how to dispose of the oil in the circumstances and was told to "put it in the bain-marie", a metal bucket-like utensil located on the floor of the area. Melinda emptied the hot water from the unit into the bain-marie (under the impression it was hot oil) and then poured the hot oil from the unit into the same container.

When the hot oil hit the hot water it started to explode.

Melinda suffered severe burns to her body and was absent from work for more than four weeks as a result of her injuries.

Her employer accepted the blame for the accident, the reason for its occurrence being a failure of its safety, health and welfare program and in particular, a failure to provide suitable training and instruction.

The Court imposed a fine of \$20,000.

“\$5-an-hour job left Rick disfigured”.

‘Rick’ was an active, healthy teenager when he finally persuaded his reluctant parents to let him find a part-time job. They flatly rejected his first idea of a morning newspaper round. Riding his bicycle around the pre-dawn streets was simply too dangerous.

Finally his mother saw a scrawled note pinned up at the butcher shop in a nearby market saying: ‘Clean-up boys wanted’. Still worried about potential risks and not sure whether their son was old enough, his father went along with Rick to see the butcher. Yes, Rick was old enough to work, the butcher assured them.

WorkCover New South Wales



His job would be to wash meat trays and sweep out the shop: he would not be allowed near knives or machinery.

So, Rick started working three afternoons a week after school and Saturday mornings for \$5 an hour and began saving for the surfboard he dreamed of owning.

But the butcher who employed him sold the shop and, without Rick's parents knowing, the new owner had the boy doing other tasks including cleaning the shop's mincer. A few months later the regular mincing machine with safety guards was swapped for an old, rusty model without guards. One day, Rick and another boy were left unsupervised in the shop's back room to flush out the mincer.

'We had been taught to turn it on and pour a bucket of hot water into it while it was running to clean it,' recalled Rick.

Somehow his right hand got caught in the mincer. It pulled him in up to the elbow before the other boy could turn off the power. It was horrific; Rick lost the four fingers on his right hand and his forearm was mangled. The mincer was partly dismantled but part of it was still attached to his arm as he was carried to the ambulance.

Then hours of delicate microsurgery saved Rick's thumb and part of his hand. In a six-hour follow-up operation, muscle and skin grafts were used to rebuild his forearm. Rick had 10 operations in his first four weeks in hospital and another four since.

The company operating the butcher shop was fined \$20,000 for breaches of occupational health and safety laws. The magistrate said the company had obtained a clear financial benefit by employing children. Rick decided to tell his story as a warning to employers and other children: 'I wouldn't want anyone to go through what I've been through.'

*Rick (not his real name) and his family asked not to be identified to protect their privacy.
Story: Sydney Morning Herald 26/10/98.

Young Workers. Safe Workers.



WHY DO YOUNG WORKERS NEED SPECIAL ATTENTION?



New workers may work in a store or in a fast food restaurant. They might work in construction or on an assembly line in a factory, or maybe as a keyboard operator in an office. Each of these jobs and the many others available to students has its own particular hazards. It is important to know what these hazards are, and to know what their rights and duties are when you meet them.

Some hazards can cause an immediate injury. For instance, young workers could slip and fall on a wet or greasy floor, or be burned

by a hot grill. They could get splashed by a chemical, such as sulphuric acid or ammonia, and get a burn. A fire or an explosion can cause serious injury or death. Burns, cuts, muscle strains and broken bones are acute injuries that can be felt as soon as the accident happens.

Some hazards can cause young workers to become sick or injured over a period of time. For instance, if they work with certain hazardous chemicals, the damage that happens in their bodies may not be noticed right away. The free WorkCover NSW CD ROM, Hazardous Substances Multimedia Roadshow, has video clips and written information about high risk hazardous substances. You can obtain a copy of this CD by phoning 1800 658 134.

Additionally, young workers could injure themselves lifting boxes, stocking shelves, or repeating actions over and over like scanning items at a checkout counter. These chronic injuries sometimes are not noticed for years. Similarly long term exposure to noise can lead to hearing loss when older.

Some minor injuries are often “laughed off” as part of the job. They are not. Such an attitude is unacceptable. All risks for injury and illness need to be controlled.



- Biological waste
- Skin penetrating injuries, eg knife or syringe injuries
- Noise
- Confined spaces

HOW CAN EMPLOYERS PREVENT YOUNG WORKERS BEING INJURED AT WORK?

To protect young workers, employers must know the range of hazards in their workplace, and they must apply the necessary controls to ensure that people are not injured or made ill because of their work.

Employers must give young workers the information they need to undertake their work safely. There is no substitute for thorough training and careful supervision until the new worker is competent to do the tasks required.

Common workplace hazards include:

- Manual handling, eg pushing, pulling, carrying, lifting etc
- Work environment, eg floor surfaces, noise, temperature, ventilation and access
- Machinery, eg powered and non powered equipment
- Heat, eg burns and scalds
- Electricity, eg electrocution
- Harassment, bullying and/or violence involving co-workers or customers
- Hazardous substances, eg chemicals, fumes



Young Workers. Safe Workers.



To effectively manage workplace hazards employers need to work with employees to:

- Identify all hazards in the workplace
- Assess the potential for harm each hazard presents for workers and explore options for control
- Control the hazards.

For example, a young worker in a retail or manufacturing environment may be asked to move some heavy crates. Without the correct training or procedures in place, the young worker could strain their back or shoulders, trip while carrying the crates or injure themselves or others if they drop the load. The employer should *identify* these potential hazards in moving the crates; *assess* the situation and available options for controlling these risks; and

control the situation by providing a more effective solution to moving the load, i.e. using a trolley, getting assistance from another employee or reducing the size and weight of the load to a more manageable level.

WHAT SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES DO EMPLOYERS HAVE TO THEIR YOUNG WORKERS?

The Occupational Health and Safety Act is very clear about the need to protect people from injury or illness at work. Under this Act employers must:

Provide and maintain systems of work that are safe and without risk to health.

Arrange the safe use, handling, storage or transport of machinery, equipment and substances.

Provide the information, instruction, training and supervision necessary to ensure the health and safety of all workers.

Maintain the working environment and workers' facilities in a safe condition and without risks to health.



WHAT ADVICE CAN EMPLOYERS GET ABOUT OHS TRAINING FOR YOUNG WORKERS?

For advice about the kind of training programs to help employers comply with the OHS Act and where to find the appropriate trainer contact:

***WorkCover NSW
OHS Education Unit***

Phone: (02) 9841 8512

Email: ohs.education@workcover.nsw.gov.au

WHAT IF EMPLOYERS FAIL TO MEET THEIR LEGAL OBLIGATIONS TO PROTECT THEIR YOUNG WORKERS?

OHS Legislation provides severe penalties for breaches of the Act. The maximum penalty under the OHS Act is \$875,000, but there are other costs as well. These include:

- Hiring of replacement staff
- Modifications to the workplace or work systems
- Possible increases in workers' compensation premiums
- Loss of productivity



Young Workers. Safe Workers.



HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

For more information please contact WorkCover's Client Contact Centre by phoning 13 10 50 or by e-mailing contact@workcover.nsw.gov.au

The Client Contact Centre provides information about all aspects of occupational health and safety, workers' compensation and injury management. Staff will refer you to specialists where necessary. If you prefer, visit the Client Contact Centre, Ground Floor, 400 Kent Street, Sydney or your nearest WorkCover Office between 8.30am and 4.30pm weekdays.

You can also visit the WorkCover NSW website - www.workcover.nsw.gov.au

Many WorkCover publications may now be downloaded from this site. Click on Occupational Health & Safety, then Safety Zone to access our interactive multimedia tutorial on work health and safety.





Top

5

**critical injuries
to young workers**

1.

Broken bones

2.

Severe loss of blood

3.

Head injuries

4.

Amputation

5.

Severe burns or scalds





**Top 5
Causes of
Injury to
Young
Workers:**

**1.
Manual
handling**



**2.
Slips, trips
and Falls**

**3.
Being hit by
moving
objects**



**4.
Falls from a
height**

**5.
Hitting
moving
objects**