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Safe Work for Youth in Construction

Information for
Employers



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

The Concern

Youth who are under 18 years old can be an asset to your workforce. They are enthusiastic and eager to learn. However, like other new and inexperienced workers, these young workers can be injured on the job when they don't receive adequate safety training and supervision. Some injuries have a lifelong impact, and some are even fatal. Furthermore, on-the-job injuries to young workers can be costly.

Young workers get hurt when:

- They take on jobs for which they're not trained — sometimes without being asked
- They don't have appropriate supervision
- They work with dangerous tools or equipment
- They perform tasks that violate youth employment laws

Work on a construction site is especially hazardous. In fact, the construction industry, which employs less than 3% of all young workers, ranks 3rd in the number of work-related fatalities to youth — at 14% of all occupational deaths to youth under 18.

Could a tragedy like this happen at one of your work sites?

In 2000, a 16-year-old male framing construction crew member died after falling 27 feet from the third story of a residential dormitory construction site. The boy was standing on an 8-inch wide structural wooden beam while positioning roof trusses. Fall protection equipment was not being used. His head was struck by one of the 8-foot by 4-foot trusses that fell with him to the ground. He died from severe chest and head trauma.

Recommendations

★ Do	⊘ Do Not
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know the laws and check on your compliance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not hire someone younger than 16 except for office or sales work.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train young workers on what job tasks they can and cannot legally do. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not give young workers tasks that require power tool use or heavy equipment operation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure young workers get clear instructions for each and every task. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not give young workers a job task if they have not been trained on how to do that specific task.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a firm rule that young workers may ONLY work on tasks for which they're trained. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not allow young workers to do tasks for which they are not trained or that violate the law.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure young workers know the federal and state youth employment rules; some of these rules can be found inside this pamphlet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not establish work schedules that violate laws. Federal laws, and some state laws, prohibit certain young workers from working too long or too late.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize that language may be a barrier for young workers who are not fluent in English. • Ask young workers to demonstrate that they understand what was said. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not assume that young workers understand what they have been told.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide young workers with appropriate and properly sized personal protective equipment (PPE); e.g., steel-toed shoes and hard hats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not give young workers tasks that require PPE for extreme hazards (e.g., tasks requiring respirator use) or PPE that may not be designed for smaller youth proportions (e.g., tasks requiring fall protection use).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide adequate supervision. • Correct mistakes. • Stress safety to supervisors. • Encourage supervisors to set a good example for safety attitudes and safe work habits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not let young workers work alone.

More Tragedies

In 2001, a 14-year-old male laborer, working for a small construction company owned by his family, died when he was crushed under a 5-ton beam. At the time of the incident, the boy and two co-workers were using an airbag to lift the 79-foot metal beam. The boy was kneeling next to the beam when it rolled off the airbag, fell on top of his back, and pinned him against the ground. He was transported to a nearby hospital where he was pronounced dead.



In 1998, a 15-year-old roofer helper died after falling 16½ feet from a roof to the concrete below. At the time of the incident, the youth and a 16-year-old co-worker had been removing shingles from the roof of a house. While working to remove old shingles, the youth either struck a bundle of new shingles with his body or with the handle of a shovel. The bundle began to slide toward the back edge of the roof. In attempting to retrieve the bundle, the youth lost his balance and fell off the back edge of the roof, landing on his back and striking his head on the concrete. The boy died the following day of a closed head injury.

Laws to Know

Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

The federal FLSA establishes minimum wage, overtime pay, record keeping, and child labor standards affecting certain full-time and part-time workers in the private sector and in federal, state, and local governments.

Age and Hour Restrictions under FLSA

Youth under 16 years of age may only perform office or sales work in the construction industry. The federal rules also limit the number of hours and times of day that such youth may be employed.

Youth age 16 and 17 may work in the construction industry and on construction sites, but there are several tasks or jobs that are too hazardous for them to perform. There are no federal laws that restrict the number of work hours per day or per week. However, several states do restrict the number of hours and times of day that this age group may be employed. Be sure to check with your State Department of Labor.



Prohibited Jobs

Within FLSA, seventeen jobs are declared hazardous and are prohibited for youth under 18. Below is a partial list that may be particularly relevant for construction industry employers.

- Driving a motor vehicle
- Operating power-driven woodworking machines (including drills and nail guns)
- Operating forklifts, cranes, hoists or elevators
- Operating power-driven metal forming, punching, and shearing machines
- Operating power-driven circular saws, band saws, and guillotine shears
- Wrecking, demolition, and shipbreaking operations
- Roofing operations
- Excavation operations

FLSA Exemptions

If certain conditions are met, 16- and 17-year-old apprentices and student learners may be allowed to perform some of the above prohibited jobs. Youth enrolled in such programs are trained in occupational safety and health. You may wish to consider recruiting these young workers — you'll be providing them with work experience and may be rewarded with a safety-conscious employee.

Some other young workers are not fully covered by FLSA. For example, youth of any age are generally allowed to work for businesses entirely owned by their parents, except no one under 18 may be employed in the prohibited jobs that are partially listed above.

Even if FLSA doesn't apply, if you employ workers under 18 years old, be sure that:

- Tasks are appropriate for a worker's age
- Young workers are properly trained
- Young workers are supervised
- You know what tasks are prohibited for youth

Additional Laws and Information

OSHA Regulations

Remember, OSHA laws are designed to protect all employees, including young workers, from injury.

State Child Labor Laws

Although some states solely rely on the federal FLSA laws, most states have their own laws. For instance, states may have different minimum ages for employment, different hours of work restrictions, additional occupations identified as hazardous, and work permit requirements. If the employment falls under federal FLSA jurisdiction, then both federal and state laws apply — and the most restrictive law (whether it is the state or the federal) is followed.

Finally, even if all laws are followed, incidents can and do happen — being aware of the hazards and applying safety precautions may prevent a tragedy on your work site.



Information about federal child labor laws, apprentice and student learner programs, and links to state child labor laws may be obtained from the federal Department of Labor (DOL) website at www.youthrules.dol.gov (click on the employers link) or from DOL's Wage and Hour Division toll-free help line at 1-866-4US-WAGE (1-866-487-9243). TTY callers may call toll-free 1-877-889-5627.

For state-specific youth employment information, contact your State Department of Labor.