

## YOUNG WORKER ORIENTATION

This HSAGS Fast Fact is intended to promote employer awareness of how to give young workers a safe start in the workplace.

You've just hired a young worker. You know that young workers between the ages of 18 and 24 are keen, eager to work and energetic. But did you know that they may take unnecessary risks, are less likely to ask questions, and may have very little health and safety experience? Consider that this may be the young worker's first "real" job. You will want to provide information to help keep them safe on the job. You don't want them to become one of the growing number of young workers injured or killed at work.

*Do you know what you can do about it?*

### Orientation

Every worker receives some kind of orientation training. If employers fail to take control of the process in a formal manner, the workers will receive an "informal" orientation and training that will not be well planned or effective. Which process will you choose for your organization?

Employers should prepare for the entry of young workers into the workplace by developing and planning an orientation program that is specific to the special needs of the young worker. A proper orientation is well worth the investment in time and resources.

### Benefits of Young Worker Orientation

For new and young workers, orientation training provides awareness of workplace hazards, health and safety legislation, and their individual rights and responsibilities. It provides them the tools and information necessary for knowing what to do if something goes wrong. For the employer, orientation training provides workers who are safer and more productive and pose no added risk to their fellow workers.

Consider three elements when conducting new and young worker orientation training: general orientation, department-specific (or job-specific) training, and follow-up and evaluation.

### General Orientation

New and young workers should receive their first orientation and training before they actually start work.

Topics to include:

- Occupational health and safety act (OHSA, or "the Act") and legislation relevant to the workplace
- The basic rights of workers (to know, to participate and to refuse unsafe work)
- Worker responsibilities as defined in the act and in the company's health and safety policies
- The joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative (what they do and how to contact them)
- Reporting procedures
- Emergency response to, for example, fire, potentially violent clients, or power outages
- First aid procedures

The HSAGS has published a number of orientation handbooks that can assist you in developing your organization's orientation program. Visit our website to view or order these.

### Department-Specific Orientation

Consider the following with new or young workers in mind, when developing or updating your department-specific orientation training.

- Inform new and young workers of all hazards associated with the work they will be performing.
- Demonstrate to them the correct and safe way to do the job
- Show them how to read and understand a WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) label. This is very important since most young workers have had a little work experience or contact with chemicals that are found in the workplace.

- Train young workers to recognize and report hazards. Young workers may hesitate to report safety hazards because they are second-guessing their ability to determine what is hazardous. Young workers are often afraid of losing their job if they report a hazard to their supervisor.
- Train all young workers before they take on any new task, and do not expect them to do any job for which they have not received training. Spend time showing them how to do a task safely; even lifting boxes warrants a quick overview of how to do it safely.

When training, follow these steps:

1. Give them clear instructions and tell them what safety precautions to take.
  2. Ask them to repeat your instructions back to you.
  3. Give them the opportunity to ask questions.
  4. Show them how to perform the task and then have them show you.
  5. Watch them complete the task; correct any mistakes they make (as required).
  6. Ask if they have any additional questions.
  7. Continue to monitor their work to ensure they complete their job tasks properly and safely
  8. Provide them written instructions on the job, and instruct them to read and refer to these as often as necessary.
- Show them all personal protective equipment required for each task; and tell them when to wear it, where to find it, how to use it, and how to care for it.
  - Show them all the safety features of equipment and machinery they will be using.
  - Explain general safety rules such as keeping exit doors free of clutter, leaving guards on machines, and turning off equipment at the end of each shift.

## Follow-up and Evaluation

Every organization should conduct an evaluation with every training program they conduct – orientation and new worker training is no exception. A process should be developed to monitor how effective the orientation has been. The evaluation should be conducted with new staff and young workers, as well as with co-workers and training providers.

Throughout all of the initial job training and orientation, managers and supervisors should communicate often with the new workers and encourage them to communicate freely, especially regarding any health and safety concerns that they may have.

## Providing Suitable Work for a Young Worker

Assign young workers jobs that do not require specialized training, do not involve critical or risky tasks, and do not require working alone or unsupervised.

Educate your employees about the special needs of the young worker. Stress safety among first-line supervisors who have the greatest opportunity to influence the young worker's work practices from the very first day on the job. During a staff meeting before the young worker begins working, discuss how to help the young worker adapt. Make it clear to staff which tasks are suitable for the young worker and which are not. Consider fixing warning stickers to equipment that young workers are not to use or operate.

Young workers are eager to learn and quite willing to accept new challenges, so providing them an effective early orientation to workplace health and safety will yield lifetime dividends for everyone!