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FACTS

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

Young worker safety – advice for supervisors

Introduction

According to European statistics, the work injury rate for young people aged 18-24 years is 50% higher than for any other age group of workers. Lack of adequate supervision contributes to this high accident count. Young people at work will be unfamiliar with their jobs, their surroundings and the risks associated with them. Inexperience will mean that they are unlikely to recognise risks or pay sufficient attention to them. There are also some specific restrictions on the work of under 18s. Therefore, in addition to training, young people are likely to need more supervision than adults. This includes students on work experience or training placements and new recruits.

A 17 year-old lost part of a finger only one hour after starting her holiday job. Her fingers were crushed in a machine at the bakery where she worked. The catalogue of health and safety failings included her *supervisor not being aware that she was using the machine until the accident happened.*

A young man, aged 23, suffered extensive burns from coming into contact with a flammable substance used to wash out spray-painting guns. Unsafe methods at the company included carrying the hazardous gun wash in unlabelled, open topped buckets and *lack of training and supervision.*

A 16-year old's legs were broken, less than two hours into his first day at work, when he fell from the footplate of an 18-ton refuse lorry and was dragged under the lorry. Safety procedures existed but the system to ensure that they were used was inadequate. *Lack of supervision and training were a particular problem.*

Your employer's supervision arrangements (1)

Your employer must make proper arrangements for supervising young people. They must also carry out a risk assessment that identifies the particular risks to young people and the prevention measures needed, including supervision needs.

For your role as a supervisor your employer should:

- adequately train you about the risks and control measures connected with the work of young people, any restrictions on the tasks young people can do and supervision levels needed, including which work operations need constant supervision;
- train you about health and safety problems when working with young people and your supervisory role;
- ensure that you understand your role, what is required of you and how you should carry out your supervisory duties;



- provide you with sufficient time and authority to carry out your supervisory tasks;
- ensure you have the health and safety competencies for the work operations you supervise;
- make arrangements for you to report any problems regarding young worker safety and make suggestions for improvements, including to supervision arrangements.

Supervisors: your vital role

As a supervisor, you have an important role to play in ensuring the health and safety of young people, in a number of ways:

- ensuring safe work practices are implemented;
- explaining their importance;
- setting a good example yourself;
- helping to promote a safety culture and;
- rewarding safe behaviour.

Young people may lack experience but it is still important to actively seek their views and encourage their participation in safety matters. There should be arrangements in place for young worker health and safety based on a risk assessment. Measures need to be monitored to check they work as expected and may need revision if there are any changes. So, you should report any problems or changes, and encourage young people to report any problems and concerns too.

(1) For more information see the factsheet 'Young Worker Safety – Advice for Employers'.

Supervising young workers involves^(?):

Assessing the learner's abilities/competence for tasks;

Identifying hazards that could injure young people; young people are more vulnerable and may require closer supervision than other employees;

Putting in place effective controls/precautions to prevent injury; for example, guards, barriers, prohibitions, inspections, spot checks, information, training, procedures and supervision;

Improving and simplifying safe work practices continuously;

Informing and instructing on good practice;

Demonstrating the correct procedure, at slow pace if necessary;

Allocating tasks according to an individual's capability and providing direct supervision until they are competent;

Checking their understanding of the correct procedure and precautions necessary;

Observing their performance and repeating the demonstration, if necessary, to reinforce understanding;

Listening to them, consulting and sharing, for example by involving them in risk assessments;

Informing young people of where they can get help/advice in your absence and what to do if they are unsure;

Ensuring they are aware of emergency procedures;

Issuing any written safe work procedures and protective equipment/clothing associated with the task;

Instilling values, explaining the importance of health and safety, promoting right attitudes, raising awareness and setting a good example;

Motivating, befriending, facilitating and guiding;

Controlling, organizing and disciplining if necessary.

Special needs of under-18s^(?)

Supervisors need to be aware that there are certain tasks that those under their supervision must not be allowed to perform.

As a general rule under-18s must NOT do work which:

- exceeds their physical or mental capacities;
- exposes them to substances which are toxic or cause cancer;

- exposes them to radiation;
- involves extreme heat, noise or vibration;
- involves risks that they are unlikely to recognise or avoid because of their lack of experience or training or their insufficient attention to safety.

Factsheet 'Protection for young people in the workplace' provides more details of task and hours restrictions according to age, and special exceptions for vocational training. If you are in doubt about the work of young people, raise it with your employer. Check national requirements.

Mentoring

Some employers assign mentors to young people. The role of a mentor is to specifically look after and guide the young person allocated to them. This involves^(*):

- teaching them the right way as a foundation for their future working life. If you take short cuts, you may have the knowledge and skills to deal with problems but a young person won't;
- encouraging them to participate, to ask questions about the risks and precautions of the job, to discuss and report any hazards they see. Channel their eagerness to please;
- assuring them it is OK to say 'no' if they are unsure of what to do;
- reinforcing the need to wear the correct equipment and to use the correct precautions.

A 22 year-old agency worker was hit and killed by a train while working on a busy area of railway track. The student had only worked a few shifts and had received only a basic personal track safety course. Safety procedures and supervision were inadequate. Following the incident the employment agency introduced a number of changes including a mentoring system to monitor the progress of new staff.

Further information on young workers at:

<http://ew2006.osha.eu.int/>

More information on guidance for Great Britain available from <http://www.hse.gov.uk>

More information on legislation for Ireland is available at: <http://www.hsa.ie>

More information on legislation for Malta is available at: <http://rmt.osha.eu.int/legislation>

^(?) Adapted from advice from the Learning Skills Council and the Royal Society for Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA)

^(*) Council Directive 94/33/EC on the protection of young people at work sets minimum requirements. The law in your Member State may be stricter, for example, regarding the minimum ages that children may work and prohibited tasks, so it is important to check national legislation.

^(*) Adapted from advice from ROSPA.

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