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FACTS

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

Looking out for work hazards – advice for young people

It could happen to you

If you have an accident or damage your health at work you may have to live with the consequences for the rest of your life. Something tragic could happen to you, even on your first day at work. Most of these tragedies could be prevented.

As a young person starting work, you may be more at risk than your older colleagues. New to the job and the workplace, you lack experience of the job and of the health and safety risks that can be present. You have the right to safe and healthy work, including the necessary training and supervision and the right to ask questions and report things that look unsafe to you. If you are under 18 years old the law bans you from doing certain hazardous jobs because of your inexperience and possible immaturity. This factsheet covers hazards in the workplace. A separate factsheet provides more advice on your rights and responsibilities.

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.

- An 18 year-old apprentice mechanic died 4 days after being engulfed in flames; he was helping his manager empty a mixture of petrol and diesel into a waste tank when the petrol exploded...

And it is not just accident risks that could affect you, your health could be damaged too:

- A hairdressing apprentice reacted to the products she had to use; her hands came out in cuts and blisters so that she could not even grip a knife and fork and she had to give up the job...

The causes of such accidents and ill health include unsafe equipment, stressful conditions, fast-paced working, lack of training and supervision and lack of procedures and controls. And for under 18s, you are much more likely to have an accident if you are doing work that is restricted by law.

Tips on how to work safely (1)

- Don't perform any task until you have been properly trained.
- If you feel that you have been getting too much information, too fast, ask your supervisor to slow down and repeat the instructions.
- Don't leave your work area unless you've been told to do so. Other areas may have special hazards you don't

know about such as overhanging power lines, slippery floors or toxic chemicals.

- If you are unsure of something, ask someone first. A supervisor or co-worker might help you prevent an accident from happening.
- Don't hesitate to ask for more training.
- Wear the proper personal protective equipment for the task such as safety shoes, hard hat or gloves. Be sure that you know when to wear protective gear, where to find it, how to use it and how to care for it.
- Find out what to do in an emergency situation, whether it is a fire alarm, power failure or other situation.
- Report any accidents to your supervisor immediately. Also report them to your worker safety representative, if there is one.
- Don't ignore early signs of problems, such as headaches, aches and pains, dizziness, itchy skin or irritated eyes, nose or throat. If there is a doctor, nurse or other occupational health staff, inform them. And if you visit your family doctor with a complaint, tell them what work you do.
- Follow the advice and instructions you have been given – this includes taking your breaks, adjusting your chair properly, wearing safety gear.



(1) Adapted from resources at www.ccohs.ca/youngworkers/

Some things to ask your boss

- What are the hazards and risks (?) of my job?
- Will I receive safety training and when?
- What steps do I need to take to protect myself, is there any safety gear I should wear?
- What should I do in an emergency? Will I receive training?
- Who do I ask if I have a safety question? How do I report an accident, health problems or if I notice something wrong?
- What do I do if I get hurt? Who is the first aid person?

What should I look out for? (?)

- **Slips and trips** – the most common cause of accidents are because of overcrowding, untidy workplaces, spills on the floor, trailing cables or damaged floors.
- **Machines and equipment** – many accidents are caused by poor maintenance, lack of safety guards, lack of training, electrical faults that can cause burns, fires or kill, trying to fix a machine without stopping and disconnecting it from the power supply. Dangerous machinery is found in restaurant kitchens as well as factories.
- **Lifting loads** – that are heavy or unstable; lifting in an awkward way; or, because aids such as trolleys have not been provided.
- **Repetitive, fast work, especially in awkward postures and with insufficient rest periods** – can cause aches, pains and damage to muscles and joints (musculoskeletal disorders). Examples include factory assemble work, supermarket checkout work or from using computer keyboards or the mouse.
- **Noise** – noise levels that are too high can damage your hearing, although you will probably not be aware of it as it happens slowly. The damage can never be repaired. Other physical hazards include vibration and radiation.
- **Chemicals** – including common cleaning fluids, paints, hairdressing products and dust. Substances found at work may cause disfiguring allergic skin rashes, permanent asthma, cancers or birth defects. They can affect the liver, nervous system and the blood.
- **Stress** – may stem from how your job is organised - impossible workloads, unclear responsibilities, too much pressure. Stress can result from bullying from bosses or work mates.
- **Violence** – if you have contact with members of the public. It includes verbal abuse and physical assaults. It is definitely not just 'part of the job'.
- **Work environment** – discomfort from heat or cold and more serious problems from extremes of temperature; poor lighting etc.

Type of work	Examples of hazards
Cleaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Toxic chemicals in cleaning products ➤ Sharp things in rubbish ➤ Slipping and falling hazards
Catering, restaurants, fast food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Slippery floors ➤ Hot cooking equipment ➤ Sharp objects
Shops/sales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Physical violence and verbal abuse from customers ➤ Heavy lifting ➤ Long periods standing
Office/clerical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Poor computer work station design ➤ Poor seating ➤ Stress ➤ Harassment
Caring for people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Contaminated blood and body fluids ➤ Lifting and awkward postures ➤ Physical violence and verbal abuse ➤ Slipping and falling hazards
Hair dressing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Awkward postures ➤ Long periods standing ➤ Allergy producing chemicals in hair products
Factory work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Dangerous machines ➤ Fast-paced work ➤ Slipping and falling hazards ➤ Transport hazards, for example, with lift-trucks

Get your rights and act responsibly

You have rights at work:

1. Right to know
2. Right to participate
3. Right to refuse unsafe work

Work is not a game and you have responsibilities at work:

- cooperating with your employer on health and safety;
- following safety procedures to protect yourself and your work mates;
- using or wearing protective devices.

Get in the know: resources on young people and work safety at <http://ew2006.osha.eu.int/>; information about individual hazards and risks in different workplaces at <http://osha.eu.int/>; sources of information include your national health and safety authority, trade unions and trade associations.

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://mt.osha.eu.int/legislation>

(?) A hazard is anything that could cause illness or injury. The risk is the likelihood of it happening. Most accidents involve a failure to assess risks properly or to take action to control risks.

(?) Adapted from www.tuc.org.uk/tuc/rights_worksafe.cfm

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