

Worker safety representatives and the protection of young workers

Summary

Young people may be at particular risk in the workplace because they lack experience and training, because they do not have the confidence to raise problems and want to appear keen and enthusiastic to their employer, or because of physical or mental immaturity. Worker safety representatives have the right to be consulted on workplace health and safety matters, including those relating to young workers. If you are a worker safety representative, this summary provides some information about looking out for young people in your workplace, and helping to ensure their safety and health.

Risks to young people and your rights to help protect them

Young people may be at particular risk in the workplace because they lack experience and training, because they do not have the confidence to raise problems and want to appear keen and enthusiastic to their employer, or because of physical or mental immaturity.

Worker safety representatives have the right to be consulted by their employers on risk assessments, and the health and safety measures that should be put in place to prevent risks. They also have the right to take part in discussions on all questions relating to safety and health at work, including the planning and organisation of training, and to make proposals.

Ways to help protect young workers

If you are a worker safety representative, here are some ways of looking out for young people in your workplace, and helping to ensure their safety and health:

- Checking that employers carry out a workplace assessment of risks to young workers;
- Working with employers to identify the jobs and parts of jobs where there are particular risks to young workers;
- Checking that all young workers receive training. Agreeing with your employer that safety representatives are provided with an opportunity to be involved in induction training. Is health and safety an integral part of job training programmes? Ensuring that training covers the hazards of the job, the precautions to be



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- followed, the young person's duty to co-operate, and what they are entitled to expect from their employer;
- Checking that there are proper supervision arrangements in place;
 - Encouraging employees to follow safety procedures, and helping them to feel confident in exercising their health and safety rights, such as taking rest breaks without feeling they are avoiding work;
 - Organising a discussion on health and safety with young people in your workplace. Asking whether they have received training, whether they were satisfied with it, what their main concerns are regarding the health and safety of their jobs, and what they think could be done about them;
 - Carrying out a 'body mapping' exercise to find out where younger workers are suffering pain, and acting on the results, reporting any symptoms to the employer and recording them as the results of accidents;
 - Ensuring that young workers and new recruits know who their safety representative is;
 - Encouraging and supporting young workers in reporting health and safety problems to employers and to their safety representative;
 - Proposing that the risks to young workers be discussed by the workplace safety committee;
 - Checking that safety policies cover young people, including their training, information and supervision, and identifying those tasks which they should not be allowed to undertake.

Young worker health risks: checking-up on strains and pains

European Statistics show that young workers are more likely to suffer a serious injury from a work accident than their older workmates. Their work can also expose them to hazards that could lead to health problems in the future, such as musculoskeletal disorders from work in awkward postures, highly repetitive work and manual handling.

The UK Trades Union Congress (TUC) suggests steps that worker safety representatives can take to protect young workers, such as:

- checking that a workplace risk assessment is done;
- Identifying any part of the job where the risk factors for 'Repetitive Strain Injuries' are present;
- Checking whether the workplace could be adjusted to take more account of them as individuals;



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- Encouraging young workers to take advantage of any work breaks to give their body a chance to recover;
- Helping young workers to feel confident about taking screen breaks - without feeling they're malingering;
- Negotiating with employers to rotate the work young people do, to create a bit of variety;
- Carrying out a body mapping session with young workers, and acting on the results, including entering any symptoms in the work accident book.

References, resources:

- TUC RSI: New Technology Poses New Risks To New Workers;
http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/tuc-2747-f0.cfm
- TUC Hazards at Work
- Barefoot research: A Worker's Manual for Organising On Work Security, ILO:
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/ses/info/publ/barefoot.htm>
- Body mapping and other hazard investigation tools for safety representatives: Hazards Magazine:
<http://www.hazards.org/tools/index.htm>
- Hazards magazine: <http://www.hazards.org/strainpain.htm>

Additional sources of information include the Agency website, trade unions, trade associations and national health and safety authorities.