10 QUESTIONS YOUNG AND NEW WORKERS NEED ANSWERED

**WHAT’S AT STAKE**

Workers between the ages of 15 and 24 are the largest percentage of the part-time, temporary, contract, casual and seasonal workforce. They’re a tremendous asset to many organizations, tackling jobs with energy and enthusiasm. Unfortunately, though, these workers also face unique and substantial risks for work-related illnesses and injuries. In 2015, more than 237,000 American youth between the ages of 14 and 24 were injured at work; 391 died.

**WHAT’S THE DANGER**

It’s not necessarily the age of young workers that puts them at risk of workplace injury. They’re at risk because of their inexperience. Many hesitate to ask questions and many don’t recognize workplace dangers. When a young worker isn’t certain how to perform a task safely, he or she may try to reason it out without asking for help. This approach is extremely dangerous, because if a guess turns out to be wrong, things can go seriously wrong.

**Example:** A 20-year-old student video journalist was filming a football practice from a hydraulic scissor lift during a windstorm. Shortly before the lift fell over, the victim posted Facebook messages revealing his reluctance to be working from heights in high winds. His last posts included “Holy (expletive), this is terrifying … Gusts of wind up to 60 miles per hour … I guess I’ve lived long enough.” Winds were gusting at more than 50 miles per hour when the lift fell over. The young man died shortly after in hospital.

**HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF**

When it comes to safety, knowledge is power. Young and new workers should be encouraged to ask questions about workplace safety, even if they feel they’re asking something that might be obvious.

Before tackling a new job, be sure to get answers to these questions:

1. What are the hazards of this job?
2. Will I be working with equipment or machinery that could put me at risk for injury?
3. What safety training will I receive?
4. Will I need personal protective equipment (PPE)? If so, will it be provided to me or must I purchase it?
5. What’s the company’s fire safety program?
6. What do I do if I find myself in a violent situation?
7. Who should I talk to if I don’t understand how to perform one of my job’s tasks?
8. How do I recognize and report unsafe conditions?
9. What do I do if I’m injured on the job?
10. What’s my role in the company’s safety program?

**FINAL WORD**

A safe workplace is a team effort. If you’re an experienced worker, speak up if you observe young workers committing unsafe acts or failing to wear appropriate PPE. If it appears that your young co-worker has not received adequate training or hasn’t understood it, tell a supervisor. And set a good example. Show new workers the right way to perform a job: The safe way.

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