NIOSH ALERT

Preventing Deaths, Injuries, and Illnesses of Young Workers

WARNING!

Many young workers die or are hospitalized each year from injuries at work. Many also suffer adverse health effects from hazardous exposures in the workplace.

Young workers

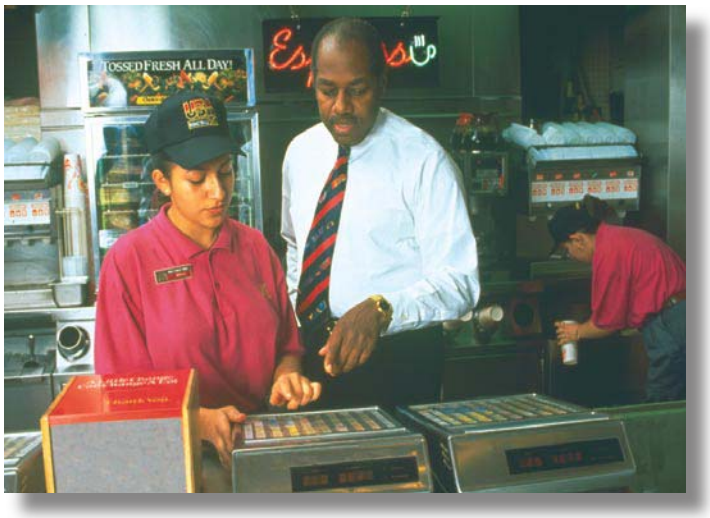
Young workers should take the following steps to protect themselves:

- **Know about and follow safe work practices:**
  - — Recognize the potential for injury at work.
  - — Follow safe work practices.
  - — Seek information about safe work practices from employers, school counselors, parents, State labor departments, and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). Visit www.youthrules.dol.gov or call 1–866–4–USWAGE.
- **Ask about training:** Participate in training programs offered by your employer or request training if none is offered.
- **Ask about hazards:** Don't be afraid to ask questions if you are not sure about the task you are asked to do. Discuss your concerns with your supervisor or employer first.
- **Know your rights:** Be aware that you have the right to work in a safe and healthful work environment free of recognized hazards. Visit www.osha.gov/SLTC/teenworkers/index.html.
  - — You have the right to refuse unsafe work tasks and conditions.
  - — You have the right to file complaints with the DOL when you feel your rights have been violated or your safety has been jeopardized.
  - — You are entitled to workers' compensation for a work-related injury or illness.
- **Know the laws:** Before you start work, learn what jobs young workers are prohibited from doing. State laws may be more restrictive than Federal laws, and they vary considerably from State to State. Visit www.youthrules.dol.gov, or call 1–866–4–USWAGE.

Employers

Employers should take the following steps to protect young workers:

- **Recognize the hazards:**
  - — Reduce the potential for injury or illness in young workers by assessing and eliminating hazards in the workplace.
  - — Make sure equipment used by young workers is safe and legal. Visit www.dol.gov/dol/topic/youthlabor/hazardousjobs.htm or call 1–866–4–USADOL.
- **Supervise young workers:**
  - — Make sure that young workers are appropriately supervised.
  - — Make sure that supervisors and adult coworkers are aware of tasks young workers may or may not perform.
  - — Label equipment that young workers cannot use, or color-code uniforms of young workers so that others will know they cannot perform certain jobs.
- **Provide training:**
  - — Provide training to ensure that young workers recognize hazards and are competent in safe work practices.
  - — Have young workers demonstrate that they can perform assigned tasks safely and correctly.
  - — Ask young workers for feedback about the training.
- **Know and comply with the laws:** Know and comply with child labor laws and occupational safety and health regulations that apply to your business. State laws may be more restrictive than Federal laws, and they vary considerably from State to State. Post these regulations for workers to read. For information about Federal child labor laws, visit www.dol.gov/dol/topic/youthlabor/index.htm or call 1–866–4–USADOL. For State laws, visit www.ilsa.net or www.youthrules.dol.gov/states.htm, or call 1–866–4–USWAGE. Information about OSHA regulations that apply to all workers is available at www.osha.gov.



- **Develop an injury and illness prevention program:** Involve supervisors and experienced workers in developing a comprehensive safety program that includes an injury and illness prevention program and a process for identifying and solving safety and health problems. OSHA consultation programs are available in every State to help employers identify hazards and improve their safety and health management programs. Visit www.osha.gov/oshprogs/consult.html.

Educators

Educators should take the following steps to protect young workers:

- **Talk to students about work:** Talk to students about safety and health hazards in the workplace and students' rights and responsibilities as workers.
- **Ensure the safety of school-based work experience programs:** Ensure that vocational education programs, school-to-work, or Workforce Investment Act partnerships offer students work that is allowed by law and is in safe and healthful environments free of recognized hazards. All such programs should include safety and health training.

- **Include worker safety and health in the school curriculum:** Incorporate occupational safety and health topics into high school and junior high curricula (e.g., safety and health regulations, how to recognize hazards, how to communicate safety concerns, where to go for help). Information is available from NIOSH at www.cdc.gov/niosh/pdfs/99-141.pdf [NIOSH 1999] or 1–800–35–NIOSH.
- **Know the laws:** If you are responsible for signing work permits or certificates, know the child labor laws. State laws may be more restrictive than Federal laws, and they vary considerably from State to State. Visit www.dol.gov/dol/topic/youthlabor/ResourcesforEducators.htm (or call 1–866–4–USADOL), www.youthrules.dol.gov (or call 1–866–4–USWAGE), or visit www.osha.gov/SLTC/teenworkers/index.html.

Parents

Parents should take the following steps to protect young workers:

- **Take an active role in your child's employment:**
  - — Know the name of your child's employer and your child's work address and phone number.
  - — Ask your child about the types of work involved, work tasks, and equipment he or she uses at work.
  - — Ask your child about training and supervision provided by the employer.
  - — Be alert for signs of fatigue or stress as your child tries to balance demands of work, school, home, and extracurricular activities.
- **Know the laws:** Be familiar with child labor laws. State laws may be more restrictive than Federal laws, and they vary considerably from State to State. Don't assume that your child's employer knows about these laws. Visit www.dol.gov/dol/topic/youthlabor/ParentsofYoung.htm (or call 1–866–4–USADOL), www.youthrules.dol.gov (or call 1–866–4–USWAGE), or www.osha.gov/SLTC/teenworkers/index.html.

- **Be aware of young workers' rights:** Report unsafe working conditions or employment in violation of child labor laws to DOL. Young workers are eligible for workers' compensation benefits if injured on the job.
- **Share information with other parents:** Studies have shown that most young workers and parents are not aware of the laws and rights of young workers.

For additional information, see ***NIOSH Alert: Preventing Deaths, Injuries, and Illnesses of Young Workers*** [DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2003–128]. Single copies of the Alert are available free from

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