



# Safety Scene

## Keeping Your Young Workers Safe

by Molly E. Butz

Learn how to avoid safety hazards that come when employing young and inexperienced workers.

**A**s the weather warms up and summer breaks loom large, it's possible you'll be hiring a few part-time students to help in your component manufacturing facility. High school and college students can be a valuable resource, especially during the busy summer months. And although it's likely that the students you will hire are new to the industry, their general enthusiasm and interest in learning make them ideal candidates for soaking up some hours.

With your new student workers in place, it's important to remember that although they may be eager, because of their inexperience and youth they also bring with

them a unique set of safety risks. Not only will they be unfamiliar with your company's safety practices, they will probably be entirely unaware of the perils a component manufacturing plant can present, such as dangerous equipment and awkward sized materials. And, although young workers may be completing all of the tasks associated with this "grown-up," full-time job, they are not as physically, psychologically or emotionally mature as your adult workers. Note to self: handle with care.

The good news is that your company can do a number of things to protect your young workers. For starters, it's important to know and understand the Department of Labor (DOL) laws that protect adolescent workers: the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act. (Your individual state may have additional child labor laws that are more stringent; check with your state labor office for more information. For a listing of state labor office contact information, visit [http://www.dol.gov/esa/contacts/state\\_of.htm](http://www.dol.gov/esa/contacts/state_of.htm).)



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The FLSA and applicable state labor laws spell out two main concerns: what type of jobs young workers may have and how many hours they are allowed to work. For the office, you may happen upon a 14 or 15 year old you'd like to hire, but in your manufacturing area you'll be limited to students 16 and older. (No manufacturing occupations are allowed for adolescents under 16.) Once a person reaches 18 years of age, the FLSA child labor laws no longer apply. Until then, your young workers cannot operate any motor vehicles (including forklifts and delivery trucks) or any of your power-driven woodworking machines, including circular and band saws. And while 14- and 15-year-olds have some restrictions on permissible hours, at 16 they "may perform any non-hazardous job for unlimited hours." [Source: elaws – Fair Labor Standards Act Advisor: Hours Restrictions, [www.dol.gov/elaws/esa/flsa/docs/hours.asp](http://www.dol.gov/elaws/esa/flsa/docs/hours.asp)]

### at a glance

- ☐ High school and college students can be a valuable resource during the summer months.
- ☐ Their inexperience can also bring a unique set of safety risks.
- ☐ Create a safe environment for your summer help with a few simple adjustments.

**...you're required to comply with any and all of the applicable OSHA and OSHA-related standards regarding the safety and health of your employees.**

The OSH Act applies to ALL of your employees, not just the young ones. It states that as the employer, you will assess your workplace and provide a facility "free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees." [Source: The Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 – General Duty Clause.] Translated, this means you're required to comply with any and all of the applicable OSHA and OSHA-related standards regarding the safety and health of your employees.

Beyond knowing and understanding the laws that protect your young workers, you'll want to take a few additional steps to ensure their safety in your facility. NIOSH reported that in 2004, 35 of the 2.2 million U.S. workers under the age of 18 died from work-related injuries and in 2003, over 54,000 employees in the under 18 age group were treated in emergency rooms across the U.S. for work-related injuries and illnesses. Here are some simple ways to create a safe environment for your summer help—and the rest of your employees for that matter!

- Supply your young workers with thorough training when they begin. Be sure to hit on all of the critical topics from personal protective equipment to reporting an injury.

- Make certain they know who their supervisor will be and be sure that person is up to date on all of your safety policies and procedures.
- Schedule regular "feedback" sessions to confirm that your new workers understand the hazards and don't have any unanswered questions.
- Use a mentoring system (outside of the supervisor) so young workers have at least one other experienced person he or she can go to with questions.
- Make sure that any equipment your young worker might/will operate is safe and legal for them to use!

Work-related injuries and illnesses can be costly and even deadly, especially for unseasoned, youth workers. Fortunately, a strong safety program, proper training and a few simple work practices can keep your summer help protected. So, whether they'll be filling in for people on vacation or taking a temporary place in one of your crews, be sure your new workers have all of the information they need to understand the hazards your facility can present. Not only will it keep your product flowing steadily through your facility, it will also send a clear, early message to young workers that safety should always be number one. Safety first! **SBC**

To pose a question for this column or to learn more about WTCA's Operation Safety Program, contact WTCA Staff at 608/274-4849, email [wtca@sbccindustry.com](mailto:wtca@sbccindustry.com), or view the Operation Safety demonstration online at [www.wtcalco.com](http://www.wtcalco.com).



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