

# HSS Safety Message



## Spring Safety Message Teen Workers

Teenage workers, 'teens,' or young workers; however you wish to characterize them, are often at risk - Risk that we can help them avoid.

Most youth find paid employment, either during the summer or year-round, before graduating from high school. Young workers, ages 14-24, are at a high risk of workplace injury because of their inexperience at work and their physical, cognitive, and emotional developmental characteristics. They often hesitate to ask questions and may fail to recognize workplace dangers.



Every year more than 200,000 kids under 18 are injured on the job. Whether they're pumping gas or flipping burgers, teen workers need to take charge of their own safety.

When teenagers go job hunting, they often have just one thing in mind: money -- money for dates, college, or even their family's rent and groceries. They aren't worried about long-term job security or climbing the career ladder. And for the most part, they don't even think about job safety. They're young and invincible, and nobody would give them an unsafe job... right?

Wrong. Job safety may not be on teenagers' minds, but work-related injuries are among the biggest threats to their health. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), more than 200,000 kids between the ages of 14 and 17 are hurt on the

job every year in the United States, and more than 75,000 need emergency hospital treatment.

And physical injuries aren't the only danger. According to a report in the Journal of the American Medical Association, high school students who work at least 20 hours each week during the school year are at particularly high risk for emotional distress and substance abuse.

The types of injuries teens suffer are as varied as the jobs they're willing to take. Some burn themselves making french fries, some injure their backs while loading trucks, others get shot while working the night shift at a convenience store.



Each year, roughly 70 kids under 18 die at work from workplace injuries resulting from:

- Unsafe equipment
- Stressful conditions
- Inadequate safety training
- Inadequate supervision
- Dangerous work that is illegal or inappropriate for youth
- Trying to hurry to complete a task or to finish a task prior to the end of work

The leading causes of workplace accidents and fatalities includes:

- Driving or traveling as passengers in motor vehicles
- Machine-related accidents
- Electrocution
- Falls

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Often, neither teens nor parents know that some jobs are considered too hazardous for younger workers to perform. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) prohibits workers under the age of 18 from doing tasks identified as hazardous such as driving forklifts, or using electric meat slicers. It also limits the hours you can work. See the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) Advisor on the DOL web site at: <http://www.dol.gov/elaws/flsa.htm>

Some workplace hazards teen workers should be alert to include:



#### **Agricultural Hazards:**

- Heavy machinery (Agricultural Tractors) - 42% of the young workers killed from 1992-2000, lost their lives in farming jobs. One third of these accidents involved tractors.
- Unprotected heights (Falls)
- Falling or flying objects
- Electrocution
- Confined spaces
- Toxic chemicals

#### **Non-Agricultural Hazards:**

- Cuts - Sharp objects, containers and products
- Burns - Hot cooking equipment
- Falls - Slippery floors
- Electrocution
- Heavy lifting
- "Struck-by" or "Caught between" rotating machinery

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration has an excellent web site with information for teen workers, parents of teen workers and those employing younger workers. See <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/teenworkers/>

