

# Teen Safety: Tips for Employers

A publication by Oklahoma Department of Labor partners

## Hiring and Protecting Young Workers

In a time when the economy can be as unpredictable as the weather, many businesses are looking for ways to keep costs to a minimum. Hiring younger workers may seem like the perfect solution. Without much experience, you're less likely to pay a teenager as much as an employee with 30 years in the field, plus, many employers also like the idea of helping a young man or woman get their start. Industries such as agriculture, hospitality, retail and other trade services are hot spots for the youthful worker, who often enjoy the fast paced, easy going atmosphere these types of jobs can offer.

But if you're an employer of the youthful worker, be aware, it can be more costly, unless you're smart.

Statistics show, new employees are more likely to suffer a workplace injury than those who have been on the job for a while. Teenagers often don't have the advantage of having any job experience prior to coming to work for you, which can make them especially susceptible to having on the job injuries, and thus, higher workers compensation rates for you.

Worst of all, an average of 70 teenagers lose their life on the job each year. No one wants an employee killed, especially one so young and full of potential.

So what's a boss to do?

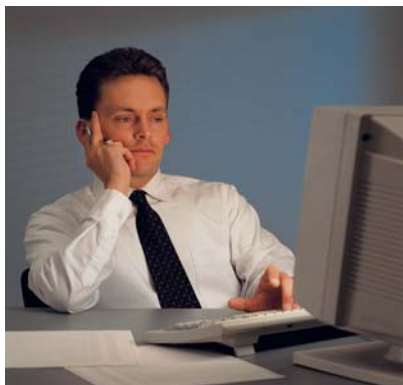
Training is the first step. Before any employee starts work, no matter what age, OSHA requires them to be trained on the hazards associated with the work they perform. It's also vital to ensure you are not asking an employee to do a job that has been deemed unsafe for them.

Child Labor Laws specifically define the duties that a teenager can and cannot perform, as well as defining industries where teenage workers are prohibited. By knowing these rules, you can help ensure your youthful workers are protected on the job.

Additionally, teenage workers may need more supervision than other employees, especially at first. It takes time to build job skills, but it also takes time

for employees to learn good judgement. If the supervisor is always handy, they're more likely to ask questions before starting a new job or task, and the supervisor is always there to help or provide additional one-on-one training with the worker.

Most importantly, maintain an open and honest line of communication with employees. Teenagers may be afraid to ask questions or seek assistance when starting a new task, but knowing that their supervisors are willing and ready to lend a hand can make all the difference in the world.



## Here's What Other Employers Are Doing...

Keeping teens safe on the job may seem like a daunting task, but other employers have found some creative solutions to keeping teen workers safe. Here are just a few examples:

★ A California zoo assigns each new teen worker a "buddy" or a mentor. Sometimes this is a more experienced teen worker, sometimes it is an adult. This mentor answers questions, helps give hands-on training, and offers safety tips.

★ A retail clothing chain with many young employees uses role-playing regularly at monthly safety meetings. Workers enact specific health and safety problems that have come up, and develop solutions.

★ At one chain of convenience stores, young employees are issued different colored smocks, based on age. This lets the supervisor know at a glance who is not allowed to operate the electric meat slicer.

★ One employer in the fast food industry, with 8,000 young workers in five states, developed a computerized tracking system to ensure teens aren't scheduled for too many hours during school weeks.

★ One major grocery store chain includes teen workers on the safety committee that conducts safety inspections, reviews employee injuries and makes suggestions for prevention.

## What you should know about *Teen Safety*:

Page 2 – Rights and Responsibilities for Employers ... about the laws that apply

Page 2 – Six Steps To Safer Teen Jobs ... guidelines for ensuring teen safety

Page 3 – Resources for Teen Safety ... Federal and state agency contact info

Page 3 – Understanding Child Labor Laws ... prohibited occupations for teens



## Employer's Requirements

As the employer, you are required to:

1. Meet your general duty responsibilities to provide a workplace free from recognized hazards;
2. Keep workers informed about OSHA and safety & health matters with which they are involved;
3. Comply, in a reasonable manner, with standards, rules and regulations issued under the OSH Act;
4. Be familiar with mandatory OSHA Standards;
5. Make copies of standards available to employees, upon request;
6. Evaluate workplace conditions;
7. Minimize or eliminate potential hazards;
8. Provide employees safe, properly maintained tools and equipment, including personal protective equipment, and ensure they use it.



## Employer's Rights

As an employer, you have rights under the OSH Act. Among those are the right to:

1. Seek free advice and on-site consultation and be involved in job safety & health through industry associations;
2. Request and receive proper identification of OSHA compliance officers, including having an opening and closing conference with the compliance officer and accompany them on the inspection;
3. File a notice of contest to dispute inspection results and request an informal settlement agreement process after an inspection.
4. Submit information or comments to OSHA on new regulations
5. Submit a written request to NIOSH for information.

# Six Steps to Safer Teen Jobs

**1. Know the laws** – Oklahoma's child labor laws prohibit teens from working late and/or long hours, and doing work that's especially dangerous. OSHA regulations are designed to protect all workers, including teens.

**2. Check your compliance** – make sure teen employees are not assigned to work schedules or asked to do jobs that are unsafe, or that violate the law, like operating heavy equipment or power tools.

**3. Make sure teens have work permits** - workers under 18 must apply for a work permit from their school before beginning a new job. Work permits are not required for those who have graduated from high school, or obtained their GED.

**4. Stress safety to the frontline supervisors** – make sure supervisors who give teens their job assignments know the laws. Encourage supervisors to set good examples for their workers. They are in the best position to influence teens' attitudes and work habits.

**5. Set up a safety and health program** – make sure all jobs and work areas are free of hazards. The law requires you to provide a safe and healthful workplace. Work with outside professionals to identify and resolve safety hazards. You can get free, non-punitive, consultation services from the Oklahoma Department of Labor, to assist you and your employees in learning what the OSHA requirements are and how to set up an effective safety and health management system.

**6. Train teens to value safety** – give teens clear instructions for each tasks, especially unfamiliar ones. Provide hands-on training on the correct use of equipment. Show them what precautions to take.

Also, observe teens as they work, and correct any mistakes they make. Re-train them regularly.

Encourage supervisors to involve teens with in-house inspections, to identify and resolve hazards. This helps improve their awareness of potential hazards in the workplace. Teens also make a good addition to an in-house safety committee, where they can voice their concerns, and address the hazards applicable to them.

Prepare teens for emergencies. Make sure they know what to do (and not do) in the event of fire, tornado, robbery, chemical spills or other situations.

Make sure they know what to do if they get hurt. OSHA regulations require all employees to have written plans on how to report injuries and illnesses, and to train workers on what to do.

Provide teens with the appropriate personal protective equipment for the jobs/tasks they are performing. Train them on how to use and care for the equipment properly. It's also important that they understand the limitations of the equipment, so they don't have any unrealistic expectations of what the device can or can't protect them from.



*No job is worth a child's life!*

The Oklahoma State Department of Labor, Federal OSHA and the Oklahoma Safety Council recognize the importance of establishing a collaborative relationship to foster an awareness of safety and health among young workers in Oklahoma. This publication has been developed in cooperation with our partners to promote teen safety in the workplace.

**Our partners on the Internet:**



Learn more about workplace safety at OSHA's Teen Worker webpage – [www.osha.gov/SLTC/teenworkers/](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/teenworkers/)



Learn more about workplace safety at Oklahoma Safety Council's webpage – [www.oksafety.org](http://www.oksafety.org)



Information on child labor laws in Oklahoma are available on the "publications page" at ODOL's website – [www.labor.ok.gov](http://www.labor.ok.gov)

## Understanding Oklahoma's Child Labor Laws

### 14

Fourteen (14) years of age is the minimum age for work.

### Work Permits

Issued by the school, 14 and 15 year-olds are required to get a work permit from their school before they begin work.

### Hours of Work 14 and 15 year-olds may work:

#### *From the Tuesday after Labor Day to May 31st*

- ◆ 3 hours on a school day
- ◆ 8 hours on a non-school day;
- ◆ 18 hours in a school week
- ◆ between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.

#### *From June 1st to Labor Day*

- ◆ 8 hours on a non-school day;
- ◆ 40 hours in a non-school week
- ◆ between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m.

#### *Break Periods*

- ◆ 30 minutes for every 5 hours worked
- ◆ 1 hour for every 8 hours worked.

All minors (under the age of 16) are prohibited from working in the following occupations:

- Construction
- Cooking or baking
- Fryers or grills
- Hoisting devices
- Ladders or scaffolds
- Lawn mower or weed eater (*other than working for self*)
- Loading and unloading
- Manufacturing, mining or processing
- Motor vehicles or service as helpers on vehicles
- Power-driven machines or equipment
- Public messenger service
- Public utilities and communications
- Slicers and sharp knives
- Transportation of persons or property by rail, highway, air, water, pipeline or other means
- Warehousing or storage, and
- Any other occupation declared particularly hazardous by federal law, federal regulations or the Commissioner of Labor.

**Jobs Teenagers Can Do Include:** office and clerical work, cashiering, selling, modeling, artwork, work in advertising departments, window trimming and comparative shopping, pricing or tagging (by hand or machine), assembling orders, packing and shelving, bagging and carrying out customers orders, errands and delivery work **by foot, bicycle and public transportation only**, kitchen work, dispensing gasoline and oil, courtesy service on premises of gasoline service station, car cleaning, washing and polishing, cleaning fruits, vegetables and stocking goods, when performed in areas physically separate from areas where meat is prepared for sale and outside freezers or meat coolers.

*Note: Federal Regulations may vary from state regulations. Go to [www.youthrules.dol.gov](http://www.youthrules.dol.gov) for additional information on federal regulations.*