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Safety tips for young workers
Education is key to preventing injuries

Summer work for teens and high school graduates should be a time of new experiences, hard work, and learning new skills. But for some, it can lead to injuries -- every six minutes in the United States a teenager is injured seriously enough on the job to go to an emergency room.

In Oregon, 129 workers under age 18 were seriously injured in work-related incidents eligible for workers' compensation benefits in 2006, and more than 1,800 serious, workers' compensation-eligible injuries occurred to workers age 18 to 22. Falls and equipment mishaps are the two most common injury causes for younger workers.

The Department of Consumer and Business Services, Occupational Safety and Health Division (Oregon OSHA) reminds younger workers and their employers that they can prevent injuries at work by understanding and complying with state and federal standards for workplace safety.

The most important thing to remember is to promptly report any unsafe condition or equipment problems to your supervisor. If you have any doubt about the safety of the materials you are handling or your work duties, you have the responsibility to bring your concerns to your supervisor's attention.

Here are some other ways to prevent accidents.

Be ready for accidents and emergencies:

- Know where the first-aid kit is located in your work area.
- Do not respond to an accident unless you are trained in first aid. If you are not trained to respond, know who the designated emergency responder is in your work area.
- Report any injury to a supervisor immediately.
- Know where the emergency exits are in your work area.

Prevent cuts and lacerations:

- If you're handling a knife, always cut away from the body.
- If you do receive a cut, get first aid. All surfaces where blood may have spilled should be properly cleaned to protect you and others from bloodborne diseases.

Protect yourself, and your senses:

- Wear safety glasses to protect your eyes against liquid splashes or flying debris. If using chemicals, make sure you have been trained about chemicals that you are using and their hazards.
- Wear hearing protection when exposed to loud noises.

Work should affect your clothing choices:

- Wear clothing that is appropriate for the job and work environment.

- Wear enclosed shoes. Protect your feet from falling objects, lawn mower blades, hot grease, chemical spills, and other hazards. For jobs where heavy loads could fall, wear shoes with metal-reinforced toe guards.
- Don't wear loose clothing or dangling jewelry that can be caught in moving or rotating parts. Keep long hair restrained.

Prevent slips, trips, and falls:

- Keep floors clean and free of spills, oils, and debris.
- Do not allow electrical cords and other objects to extend across a walkway.
- While mopping, make sure signs warn others of the danger of wet surfaces.
- If you have to use a ladder, make sure it is secure. Never step on the top platform of any ladder, including a stepladder.

If your work involves machine operations:

- Do not use equipment or tools without proper guards.
- Never reach inside moving machinery.
- Do not wear gloves or loose clothing while using machines with high-speed moving parts, like drill presses.
- Never use electrical equipment when standing in water.

For work that requires manual lifting, be sure to use proper lift techniques:

- Get close to the load. Grab the load safely, with your hands under or low on the object.
- Bend your knees, with feet slightly spread for balance and stability.
- Keep your head, shoulders, and hips in a straight line as you lift. Do not twist. Turn your entire body, including your feet.
- Know how much weight you can safely lift. Get help lifting if necessary.

Keep safe and prevent exposure to violence where you work:

- If you're working late, keep doors locked and avoid working alone.
- If there is a robbery attempt, do not argue or struggle with the perpetrators.
- Ask for an escort to your car if it's dark out. Park your vehicle in a well-lighted area.

Oregon OSHA has developed a guide to help younger workers develop safe work habits and understand their workplace safety and health rights. Oregon OSHA's "Young Workers Brochure" is available on the Oregon OSHA Web site, www.orosha.org.

Employers are required by law to provide a safe workplace and follow rules about compensation, meal and rest breaks, and work that is restricted for an employee under age 18. Contact Oregon OSHA about workplace safety and health concerns at (800) 922-2689 or www.orosha.org. For questions about wage and hour requirements or restricted activities, contact the Bureau of Labor and Industries at (971) 673-0761 or www.oregon.gov/BOLI.

Oregon OSHA, a division of the Department of Consumer & Business Services, enforces the state's workplace safety and health rules and works to improve workplace safety and health for all Oregon workers. The Department of Consumer and Business Services is Oregon's largest business regulatory and consumer protection agency. For more information, visit www.dcbs.oregon.gov.