

# YOUTH ON THE JOB

## #3 STAND UP FOR YOUR RIGHTS

**It is your right to be safe.** You have the RIGHT as a worker to be safe on the job. We know the injury rate among young people is double that of adult workers. Over 200,000 are injured annually and one young worker dies every five days. Many of these injuries and deaths can be prevented, but only if *you stand up for your rights!*

### HOW DO WE STAY SAFE ON THE JOB?

Staying safe on the job is a matter of being smart and using proper protective equipment, but to be really effective you must:

- **Know your rights and responsibilities on the job** as a worker, and specifically as a young worker
- **Use organizing and problem solving tools** to create a safe (and fairer) workplace and to prevent injuries
- **Remember you are not alone** – you can always do more by getting together with other workers

### TIPS FOR PROBLEM SOLVING

So, now you know there's a problem, have documentation and co-workers behind you – where do you go from here?

- 1. PLAN IN ADVANCE.** You know your rights and you've done your research – now you need a plan. Get together with your co-workers to make a plan of action.
- 2. KEEP RECORDS.** Make sure you keep notes about what you're planning for future reference.
- 3. BE STRATEGIC.** Plan carefully about your approach – who, what, when and how. Will you first speak to your supervisor or write a letter? Should you get a petition going? Should you involve the community, the press, local politicians?
- 4. BE PREPARED FOR DIFFERENT RESPONSES FROM MANAGEMENT.** Some bosses will “get it” and agree to reasonable changes – others will not. Create a Plan B in case Plan A doesn't go as intended.
- 5. BE CREATIVE.** There are many ways to get people involved and to get what you need. Think of new ways to communicate, reach out and solve the problem. For example, you can use the internet to connect to others or to learn more about health and safety issues.

To research information on the internet, just go to any search engine and type in “health and safety”. There are hundreds of websites that contain useful information.

### Why do young people get injured at work?

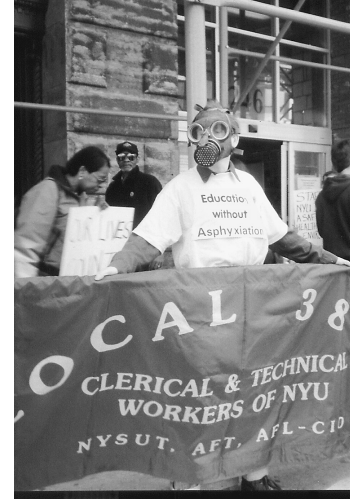
If you are going to improve safety at work, you need to understand some of the reasons why young people get injured at work:

**Insufficient training** — Over half of young workers receive little or no safety training.

**Inexperience** — Because young workers are new to the workforce, they are less skilled and sometimes unable to recognize dangers at work. Young workers are also less likely to question their employers or stick up for themselves with adults.

**Dangerous and/or inappropriate jobs** — Industries that hire young people – such as retail, fast food, health care, and construction – have high risks and also, employers sometimes ask workers to do jobs that are prohibited.

**Lack of supervision** — Studies show that young workers are undersupervised, which is associated with high injury rates.



### CREATING A PLAN OF ACTION

#### 1. GET TOGETHER WITH CO-WORKERS

Chances are that if you are experiencing hazards at work, then other workers are too. Find those workers and get together to create a plan of action for making work safe. If you go to the boss with others, you are more likely to be heard. If you go to the boss with a well-documented case and ideas about injury prevention, you are more likely to create a safer workplace.

*“I thought I was the only one, and then I talked to a girl on my shift. She also got burned on the grill. We started talking to more workers and found out that no one got training, and other people were getting hurt, too.”*

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## HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CO-WORKERS

- **Meet in a safe place.** Your co-workers may be more willing to talk about hazards they face on the job if you approach them outside of work.
- **Do Your Homework.** Find out information about the health and safety issues of concern in your workplace, which you can share. Keep records of specific incidents to strengthen your case.
- **Don't bully.** You can be a leader, organizer and bridge builder by allowing people a choice about how to get involved. Some may just listen or read an informational flyer, while others may sign a petition or come to a meeting. Let workers choose their own form of involvement, but be sure to keep everyone informed so that they stay knowledgeable and invested in the effort.
- **Be an active listener.** Others may come up with interesting ideas or information, but you might miss it if you're not listening.

## 2. MAP YOUR WORKPLACE

Complaining isn't enough. You need to create a body of evidence that shows other workers (and the boss) that a problem exists. One way to do this is to create a hazard map of your workplace.

### HAZARD MAPPING

**Draw a map of your workplace with your co-workers** – include: desks, machines, entrances, exits, bathrooms, windows, etc.

**Draw a circle around any hazards that may exist** – machines, chemicals, slippery floors, etc.

**Find the most serious hazards** – discuss the hazards you found and decide which are the most serious and mark them with a different color or symbol.

## 3. SURVEY YOUR CO-WORKERS

Create a questionnaire for co-workers asking about safety and health issues on the job. Do you feel safe? Have you or others ever been injured on the job? Did you receive training? What kinds of chemicals do you work with? You can call NYCOSH (see below) to get help on a survey.

## 4. GET EMPLOYER RECORDS

Under OSHA (the Occupational Safety & Health Administration) your employer may be required to keep records of injuries that happen in the workplace. Depending on where you work, you may have the right to get the following from your employer:

- A summary of information about medical testing done by your employer
- Illness and injury logs
- Information about tests done in your workplace or work environment
- Information about chemicals you are exposed to on the job

## 5. GET INFO FROM OSHA & NIOSH

Depending on where you work, OSHA may have inspection data on your company. They have a website where you can find out about health and safety issues, laws and they even have a teen worker link with lots of safety and health information. Go to [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov). NIOSH (the National Institute on Safety & Health) is the part of the Centers for Disease Control and can provide you with lots of health and safety information. Go to their website: [www.cdc.gov/niosh](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh). Also, you can call NYCOSH for help and you can check the NYCOSH website at [www.nycosh.org](http://www.nycosh.org).

## 6. GO TO THE UNION

If there is a union at your workplace, go to the union representative with any questions about doing your job safely and what kinds of equipment or training you need.

**WHAT IS A UNION?** A union represents employees in the workplace and at the bargaining table – where wages, benefits and working conditions are determined. However, fewer than two out of ten workers belong to unions.

Where there are unions, wages and benefits are usually higher and workers have more say in the shop or office. Unions have fought for safe and healthy workplaces by promoting the passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act and advocating for a variety of laws and policies that protect workers.



# NEED HELP!

**CALL NYCOSH.** The New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH) is a worker-friendly organization that will provide advice to you about where to go for help. NYCOSH is a non-profit coalition of 200 local unions and more than 400 individual workers, physicians, lawyers and other health and safety activists – all dedicated to the right of every worker to a safe and healthful workplace.

**CONTACT: NYCOSH 212-227-6440**  
[www.nycosh.org](http://www.nycosh.org)



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