

Young Workers Twice as Prone to Workplace & Construction Accidents

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson

- July 21, 2010

A recent report from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) shows that workers 24 and younger are twice as likely to suffer workplace injuries and wrongful death as other workers.

Among the most common were injuries resulting from [construction accidents](#), such as being struck by or caught in industrial equipment. Construction was also the industry with the second highest rate of fatal accidents.

The report was an analysis of on-the-job injuries and deaths occurring between 1998 and 2007. Overall, nearly 8 million young workers were injured, with the highest rate of accidents among workers who were 18 and 19.

The most common types of accident for all workers, but particularly for young people, were being struck by or against a tool or machine, being rubbed or abraded, or being caught in or crushed in machinery.

"Employers need to ensure that their younger workers have the requisite training and personal protective equipment to perform their jobs safely," the report urged.

How Can the Risk of Workplace and Construction Accidents Be Reduced?

The NIOSH analysis demonstrated that injuries to younger workers were consistently associated with three factors. The first was hazards in their workplaces, such as the use of ladders and knives. The second was a perception among workers that there was pressure to complete their work more quickly.

The third was minority status. In fact, the study showed that young Hispanic workers were much more likely to be killed in fatal workplace accidents than comparable black or white workers.

The best way to prevent accidents -- along with [workers' compensation](#), personal injury and wrongful death claims -- is communication and training, the report concludes.

According to the report, young people "might be less likely to recognize hazards, less likely to speak up regarding safety, and less aware of their legal rights as workers."

"This might be exacerbated for some groups of workers, such as Hispanics and workers in their first jobs," NIOSH points out.

What Supervisors Can Do to Prevent Injuries to Younger Workers

According to health and safety experts, job supervisors are in the best position to influence young workers and their work habits. Employers should make sure to:

- **Remember that they lack experience.** Something that might be obvious or common sense to an experienced worker may be a new concept for a younger employee.
- **Show young workers how to safely use equipment and explain why it is critical.** It's also essential to provide a variety of equipment sizes.
- **Set consequences for failing to follow health and safety rules.**
- **Routinely check on their use of equipment.** Correct any misuse of equipment and re-explain its importance.
- **Implement a mentoring or buddy system with older workers.** Coworkers can play a vital role in spotting problems and in encouraging a safety culture.
- **Encourage questions.** Younger workers may be reluctant to speak up, so try to spot signs that they are unsure.

Related Resource:

["NIOSH: Injury Rate Among Young Workers Significantly Higher"](#) (July 8, 2010)