

Preparing for a summer teen workforce
By G. Gordon, State Compensation Insurance Fund

As summer nears, employers are inundated with job applications from aspiring teenage workers looking for summer jobs. And with tightening budgets, a teen employee for the summer may be the perfect solution. As an employer hiring young workers, you play an important role in preparing the next generation of workers. In a typical year in the United States, 200,000 young workers are injured on the job, and summer heat adds additional hazards.

As an employee of California’s State Compensation Insurance Fund, I am committed to lowering work-related injuries and illnesses among young workers and educating employers on the specific hazards posed in the summer. State Fund (<http://www.scif.com>) is a member of the California Partnership for Young Workers Health and Safety, a coalition of agencies, labor organizations, teachers, and other professionals devoted to reducing youth work related accidents.

The following guidelines have been developed to help you prepare for summer and join State Fund in the effort to keep young people safe and healthy.

Protecting Young Employees from the Heat

Being an employer carries with it specific responsibilities; add to it young workers and the heat of the summer months and you have a new set of obligations. In order to comply with the Cal/OSHA Heat Illness Prevention Standard, there are four basic steps required of all California employers to protect employees from the heat.

Four Required Steps to Prevent Heat Illness
1. Training: Train all employees/supervisors about heat illness prevention.
2. Water: Provide enough fresh water so that each employee can drink 1 quart per hour, and encourage them to do so!
3. Shade: Provide access to shade for at least 5 minutes of rest when employees need preventative recovery period.
4. Planning: Develop and implement written procedures for complying with Cal/OSHA Heat Illness Prevention Program.

For more on this, visit <http://www.scif.com/news/features/050609EmployerResponsibilities.html>.

Safer Jobs

So you have hired your summer workers, now what? The most common reasons teens are injured on the job include lack of supervision and training and working with dangerous equipment. The first thing an employer must do before allowing employees to work is provide training. Follow State Fund’s five steps to safer teen jobs.

Steps to Safer Teen Jobs
1. Know the law: California has strict labor laws. Visit www.scif.com , to ensure you understand and are in compliance with child labor laws.
2. Ensure teen workers have work permits: Workers under 18 must apply for work permits.
3. Stress Safety to Frontline Supervisors: Develop a training program specific to supervisors.
4. Set Up a Safety and Health Program: California law requires you to provide a safe and healthy workplace.
5. Train Teens To Put Safety First: Prepare them for emergencies, encourage them to speak up if there is a problem or issue, and provide safety training.

More on the specifics of child labor laws is available on State Fund's Young Worker section, <http://www.scif.com/safety/YoungWorkers.html>.

Sun and Heat Protection, Prevention

Once you have ensured your compliance with the law and the safety of your teen workforce, it is imperative to take extra precautions for the summer. Teens working outdoors must protect themselves from heat and sun exposure. As an employer, know the potential dangers and develop a plan to protect against them.

- **Sun:** There is no such thing as "safe" ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Encourage workers to cover up, use sunscreen, wear a hat and UV-absorbent sunglasses. The American Academy of Dermatologists recommends reapplying sunscreen every two hours, at minimum. UV rays are at their highest intensity between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., so if possible, adjust shifts to account for this. Hydration, which aids in maintaining a cool body temperature, is a must when working outside in the summer months.
- **Heat:** If your employees are working outside, or indoors in high-heat facilities such as kitchens, laundry or bakeries, ensure you take precautions against heat hazards. Encourage your employees to drink small amounts of water frequently, wear light-colored, loose-fitting and breathable clothing, take frequent breaks in shaded areas, and avoid caffeine, alcoholic and high-sugar beverages. By law, employers must provide workers half-hour meal periods after no more than five hours, and ten minute rest periods after each 4 hours.
- **Heat Illness:** Heat illness is a serious threat that can result in death, and includes heat cramps, heat stress, heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Know the signs, how to recognize them, and what medical treatment is necessary.

Symptoms and Prevention

As part of your training program, ensure that supervisors know the symptoms of heat illness, who to talk to and how to get help.

Preventative measures include:

- Stay alert to employees' situations during heat waves
- Encourage employees to drink at least one quart of water per hour
- Remind workers to avoid drinking alcohol, coffee or soft drinks
- Provide breaks in the shade to cool down
- Develop a training program for employees and supervisors

Symptoms of Heat Exhaustion	Symptoms of Heat Stroke
Headache, dizziness, lightheadedness, fainting	Dry, hot skin with no sweating
Weakness, moist skin	Mental confusion
Mood changes such as irritability or confusion	Losing consciousness
Upset stomach, vomiting	Seizures, convulsions

If your teen workers are experiencing any of these symptoms, *call 911*. While waiting for help to arrive, follow these steps:

- Move the worker to a shaded, cool area
- Loosen or remove heavy clothing
- Provide cool drinking water
- Fan and mist the employee with water

Conclusion

Many teen employees are working for the first time and need time to acclimate to the job and high heat conditions. During the onset of summer, supervisors need to pay extra attention to the condition of employees. Remember to provide adequate water, recovery periods, and training for supervisors and employees. But most importantly, make sure that you allow your workers to enjoy their first job experience, and remember that you are providing a formative work experience.

Steps for Success
1. Provide extra supervision to teen workers when they are new to the job.
2. Offer clear instructions and positive feedback.
3. Encourage questions. Teen workers may be more reluctant than adults to speak up.