VULNERABLE WORKERS: 8 Core Competencies for Young Workers



Young workers (those under age 25) suffer disproportionately from workplace injuries, with a nonfatal injury rate estimated to be two times higher than among workers over 25. That's why it's so important for employers to provide comprehensive safety training for young workers. But *before* they join the workforce, young people should have basic skills to help them stay safe on the job and contribute to a safe, healthy, and productive workplace, such as the abilities to problem solve, think critically and communicate effectively.

To address this knowledge gap, NIOSH created the Safe'Skilled'Ready Workforce Program, which recognizes that although employers are responsible for providing a safe and healthy workplace, *everyone* should have basic skills to help protect them on the job now and throughout their lives.

The basic skills'called the eight core competencies'are general, transferable and can apply across all industry sectors. They can be used with the job-specific skills that workers gain through apprenticeship and career technical or vocational training. And they can be used to improve the health and safety of other places, such as homes, schools or communities. The eight core competencies include the ability to:

1. Recognize that, although work has benefits, all workers can be injured, become sick, or even be killed on the job. Workers need to know how workplace risks can affect their lives and their families.
2. Recognize that work-related injuries and illnesses are predictable and can be prevented.
3. Identify hazards at work, evaluate the risks, and predict how workers can be injured or made sick.
4. Recognize how to prevent injury and illness, describe the best ways to address workplace hazards, and apply these concepts to specific workplace problems.
5. Identify emergencies at work and decide on the best ways to address them.
6. Recognize that employers are responsible for'and workers have the right to'safe and healthy work. Workers also have the responsibility for keeping themselves and their co-workers safe.
7. Find resources that help keep workers safe and healthy on the job.
8. Demonstrate how workers can communicate with others'including people in authority roles'to ask questions or report problems or concerns when they feel unsafe or threatened.

A study of the NIOSH core competencies found that this framework for teaching young workers fundamentals about safety and health on the job fills a critical gap in preparing young people to be cognizant of workplace risks. So although the intention is for the core competencies to be integrated into school curricula, companies can'and should'integrate teaching these basic skills into their safety orientations for young (and new) workers.

For more on training and protecting young workers, see these OHS Insider articles, tools and other resources:

- A young worker orientation checklist you can use to create a young worker safety training program

- Answers to 5 FAQs about safety orientations
- Recorded webinars on young worker safety training and how to effectively provide safety training to 'generation Y' workers
- An example of how one workplace improved its young worker training program
- Young worker safety tips from England.

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