

Keeping Co-op Students Safe on the Job

Co-op work experiences provide students an opportunity to gain knowledge and skills not obtainable in a school-based setting. However, these experiences also have risks; each year more than 160,000 U.S. teens are injured at work, about a third of who are hurt badly enough to seek emergency room treatment. This tip sheet provides some simple guidelines employers can follow to help prevent injuries to co-op students placed at their worksites.

5 Steps to Safer Co-ops

1 Know and Post the Child Labor Laws

The Child Labor Laws prohibit teens from working late or long hours, and from performing certain hazardous tasks. **You should post the child labor laws in a prominent place where all employees can see them.**

Exemptions to the child labor laws for co-op students still have limitations; they may be performed *only* if the task is:

- significant to the co-op student's training;
- done *only* intermittently and for short time periods
- done only under the direct supervision of a qualified or experienced person

Remember, health and safety regulations that apply to your business cover all employees, regardless of age.

2 Eliminate Hazards

- **Identify hazards.** Review where injuries have occurred in the past.
- **Eliminate hazards.** Redesign work areas, tasks or equipment in a way that takes the hazard out of the picture; this can often be accomplished without expensive technology.
- **Provide PPE.** Personal protective equipment, such as goggles, safety shoes and gloves, can help protect against injuries and may even be required by law.

3 Provide Health & Safety Training

Work with teens to identify hazards and train them on how to do tasks safely.

- **Explain.** Explain what tasks they are not allowed to do according to the child labor laws and their co-op agreement, and give clear instructions for each task.
- **Review.** Review steps on the proper way to perform each task assigned.
- **Discuss.** Talk about any questions they have.

4 Provide Effective Supervision

Recognize that what might be obvious or common sense to an experienced employee might not be as clear to a young worker tackling a project for the first time.

- **Set an example.** Supervisors and older employees can set good examples by following safety rules.
- **Show them.** It is important to build health and safety knowledge through hands-on training and on-the-job coaching by the student's supervisor and other skilled staff.
- **Observe them.** Observe students to see that they are using the safe practices they were trained to use. If you see a teen using unsafe behaviors, correct his or her actions and explain why it is important.
- **Encourage them.** Teens may be reluctant to let others know when they don't understand something, so create an atmosphere that encourages speaking up when a problem arises or if instructions are unclear. Let students know it is expected they will need to ask about things, sometimes more than once, since a major part of co-op is learning new skills.

5 Prepare Students for Emergencies

Employees of all ages should be ready to handle different types of emergencies at work.

- **Instruct on emergencies.** Show your co-op students escape routes and explain what to do in the event of a fire, a potentially violent situation, or other emergency.
- **Provide injury procedures.** Teens also need to know what to do and where to go if an injury should occur. Make sure this information is written and accessible to all employees.

Making an effort to eliminate hazards, provide supervision and ongoing training, and actively involving *all* employees in prevention can go a long way toward reducing injuries and illnesses, building morale, and lowering your workers' compensation costs.

Frequently Asked Questions about Co-ops

Working with Family

A student doing his or her co-op placement with a relative can be a great opportunity for both. Still, **all child labor laws and co-op guidelines apply to students who carry out their co-op in a family member's business.**

What are the employer benefits of hosting a co-op student?

- Recruiting an employee in an effective, inexpensive way
- Receiving a worker with work safety and health foundation skills
- Receiving a worker already versed in the language and technology of the trade
- Observing co-op students in action for potential hire after graduation
- Building a positive relationship with the local school

How are co-op students different from a work-study students?

- **Co-ops are a curriculum requirement.** A co-op is a required component of vocational technical education during a student's junior/senior years. Work study programs are optional for traditional high school students.

- **Co-op students are employees.** Co-op students are always employed by the company at which they are placed; they are paid at least minimum wage and covered by the employer's workers' compensation insurance (which protects the employer should the student be injured on the job). Work study students may or may not be employed by the company.
- **Co-op students are exempt from some Child Labor Laws.** There are some hazardous tasks allowed for co-op students that are generally prohibited for persons under 18 (see below). These tasks are allowed under specific conditions with the understanding that they are essential to the student's training. There are no Child Labor Law exemptions for work study students.

What is the Co-op Agreement?

The co-op agreement is a contract that outlines the scope of the work the student will perform, and the responsibilities of the school, the student, and the employer. It is signed by all parties just mentioned, as well as the student's parent/guardian.

What is OSHA 10?

OSHA 10, developed by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, is a comprehensive 10-hour safety training course for employees on workplace hazards, safety, and health. These trainings can greatly benefit any employer. There is both a General Industry course and a Construction course. OSHA 10 is not required for co-op students, however, any who have completed the training will have a certificate of completion.

Summer Co-ops

Some students choose to do summer co-ops and forego their break, but summer co-ops are different from students choosing to work for you while on vacation.

Co-op exemptions to the child labor laws *do not* apply in the summer, for students that work on their own time and not through the school.

PROHIBITED JOBS FOR PERSONS UNDER 18

*Exemptions for co-op students are **starred** * and allowed only under the criteria listed on front of this sheet, including hazardous task training for students, and closely supervised intermittent performance.*

- Drive a vehicle, forklift, or work assist vehicle (except golf carts in certain circumstances)
- Ride as a passenger on a forklift
- Operate, clean or repair power-driven meat slicers, grinders or choppers *
- Operate, clean or repair power-driven bakery machines (except for certain countertop models and pizza dough rollers)
- Work 30 feet or more above ground or water *
- Handle, serve, or sell alcoholic beverages
- Use circular, chain, or band saws; guillotine shears; wood chippers; and abrasive cutting discs *
- Use power-driven woodworking machines *
- Use, service, drive, or work from hoisting machines
- Operate or load power-driven balers, compactors, or paper processing machines *
- Use power-driven metal-forming, punching, or shearing machines *
- Use buffing or polishing equipment *
- Manufacture brick, tile, or kindred products
- Manufacture or store explosives
- Work in excavation *
- Work in forest fire fighting, forest fire prevention, timber track operations, and forestry service
- Work in wrecking, demolition, or shipbreaking
- Work in logging, sawmilling, or mining
- Work slaughtering, packing, or processing meat and poultry*
- Work in railway operations *
- Work in roofing or on or about a roof *
- Work in foundries or around blast furnaces *
- Work manufacturing phosphorus or phosphorus matches *
- Work where they are exposed to radioactive substances
- Work as a firefighter or engineer on a boat *
- Oil or clean hazardous machinery in motion *
- Work in any job requiring the possession or use of a firearm