► Why a Code of Practice for young and new workers?

Young and new workers need special attention because they are at greater risk of injury than their older or more experienced counterparts. More than half of workplace injuries and fatalities involving young and new workers occur during their first six months at work; many occur within the first few weeks of employment. Many factors contribute to the much higher injury rate for young workers, especially young males, compared to that of the overall worker population. Among them are inexperience, willingness to take risks, eagerness to please, desire to impress, reluctance to ask questions or admit they don't know something, and ignorance of their workplace responsibilities and rights. All new workers are at higher risk of injury, but those with low English proficiency or poor literacy skills may be especially vulnerable, given their limited ability to understand oral and written English and fear of reprisals from their employers. (This is true particularly for the growing number of temporary foreign workers in the Yukon for whom job loss could result in the termination of their work permits and deportation to their countries of origin.)

Young and new workers need thorough orientation, in-depth training, and ongoing supervision. Most employers, especially those running small businesses, know that it can be costly and time-consuming to hire and train workers. Once workers have been hired and trained, it pays to keep them safe and on the job. The Young and New Worker Code of Practice is designed to help employers do just that.

The Code of Practice does not represent new legislation or regulation, nor does it result in new responsibilities for employers and supervisors; it provides practical guidance on existing legal requirements detailed in the *Workers' Safety and Compensation Act* and Regulations. Yukon employers have had these responsibilities all along; the Code of Practice helps employers better understand how to fulfil their legal obligations.

► Hazard Assessment

Prior to hiring anyone, employers must conduct a formal appraisal of the actual and potential safety hazards that exist in the workplace. This “hazard assessment” considers the likelihood of injury and the potential severity of an injury for each hazard identified. Measures must then be taken to minimize the risk of injury through such means as eliminating the hazard, substituting a less hazardous product or piece of equipment, developing administrative procedures (e.g., written step-by-step instructions), implementing engineering controls (e.g., guarding, ventilation, lockout mechanisms), and/or obtaining appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for workers to use. The hazard assessment is a living document that changes as hazards in the workplace change, whether through new equipment, new processes, or a change of working conditions or location.

► Orientation and training are essential

Providing effective orientation, training, and supervision to workers from their first day on the job is the best way to prevent costly workplace injuries and deaths. In fact, as an employer, you are responsible for ensuring that your workers are prepared for the job *before* they start working, by having completed a hazard assessment and by assigning tasks that fit the skills, knowledge, and maturity your workers possess—supplemented, of course, by job-specific training and work experience provided by you, the employer.

Orientation and training must be specific to the workplace and should be an ongoing process. Even an experienced worker will require a new orientation and/or training if circumstances change or new hazards develop. For example, there may be a new work process or new equipment, or the worker may be moved to a new work location or assigned to a different task.

Some employers assign a more experienced worker—one who demonstrates safe work procedures in his/her own work—to work alongside a new worker for the first few weeks or months. This buddy or mentor shows the new worker "the ropes" for that workplace, helping to ensure the new worker's safety. Other employers identify new workers through a special colour of hard hat or uniform, for example. This special identification lets everyone in the workplace know that the workers are in the learning phase of employment. *(For more young and new worker best practices, view the downloadable WorkSafeBC programs, "Young and New Workers—They're Worth Your Attention," at www.worksafebc.com → Young Worker [under "Topics"] → Employers and Supervisors [under "Resources"].)*

► How to orientate and train workers

• Orientation

Orientation is a process that familiarizes new workers with a workplace's health and safety program and with any hazards that they may be exposed to in the workplace. Orientation ensures that individuals are familiar with:

- The company's expectations for health and safety.
- The role the workers have in the health and safety program.
- The hazards of the particular workplace.

Orientation takes place on the worker's first day at work, before the worker has begun to undertake any tasks. A typical orientation should take anywhere from one to four hours; in higher-risk workplaces, the orientation could take a full day or more. An effective orientation makes workers aware of potential hazards and how to protect themselves, and lets them know who to talk to if they have questions about health and safety in the future. Be aware that the first day of work can be overwhelming for most people, and that no one can possibly take in everything all at once.

It is a good idea to prepare a handout for workers with contact information for supervisors and first aid attendants, as well as where to find more information about worker responsibilities and rights. Many employers use orientation "checklists" to ensure that all necessary topics are covered. *(Refer to the document "Sample Worker Orientation Checklist" for a list of topics to be covered in an orientation, along with references to specific Yukon regulations.)*

Keep in mind that orientation should not consist only of checkmarks on a list. Conscientious employers follow up orientation with a means of evaluating how much workers learned. For example, they may ask workers questions about specific procedures (e.g., how to clean the grill and dispose of hot oil, when and where they need to use personal protective equipment) or general requirements (e.g., what to do in an emergency, who to contact if they have a safety concern). One company gives a post-orientation 'exam' to its new workers a few days after orientation. *(A sample orientation exam used by London Drugs is included in this package of documents for your reference.)*

• **Training**

Training is task-specific and ongoing. Questions should be encouraged and answered at all stages of training. Trainers should realize that not everyone will feel comfortable asking questions, especially in group training situations. This may arise from personal shyness, cultural background, or the natural human inclination not to admit ignorance. Whatever the source of any such reluctance, it is the trainer's responsibility to ensure workers that questions are welcome and to probe when few or no questions are being asked.

A convenient training formula to follow is "Tell, Show, Do, Review, Review, Review." This formula provides employers with an effective way to structure training, and it incorporates the different learning preferences people have (e.g., auditory, visual, hands-on), ensuring that all workers are able to benefit from the training.

"Tell" is the instruction phase of the training, during which the trainer explains to the worker how to carry out a task. The worker is told how to do the task safely and about any hazards associated with the task and how to protect him/herself from those hazards—including the use of any personal protective equipment (PPE). This phase of training may include the use of instruction manuals, written step-by-step procedures, online training modules, or other means of delivery information. Trainers need to be aware of their trainees' English proficiency and literacy levels. In some cases instruction should be carried out, and written material provided, in the worker's native language, if possible. For workers with low literacy (which may not always be readily apparent), the trainer may have to provide instruction in ways that do not rely on the written word (e.g., through the use of pictures, video, etc.).

"Show" is the demonstration phase of training, during which the trainer demonstrates and explains each task, step by step, incorporating all necessary safety procedures. If PPE is required, the trainer must clearly demonstrate its use and its maintenance. The worker observes and asks questions. The trainer may have to probe if the worker is not asking questions.

"Do" is the worker's first opportunity to perform the task him/herself. This hands-on step is carefully observed by the trainer, who offers correction and additional information as necessary. The trainer may need to re-demonstrate the task one or more times until the worker feels comfortable performing the task.

The “review, review, review” step underscores the importance of frequent observation and, if necessary, (re)enforcement of safety rules and procedures—especially for critical tasks where there is a risk of injury. For tasks that are performed infrequently, it is a good idea to observe the worker performing the task the first two or three times, to ensure that the worker does not miss any of the safety steps involved. You might even consider giving “pop quizzes” of such tasks to refresh the worker’s memory.

Some workers need more time than others to learn how to do their jobs safely. Others may require additional or repeat training before they feel comfortable performing certain tasks. The Code of Practice recognizes this by requiring employers to provide additional orientation or training when it is reasonably requested by a worker. For example, a worker may reasonably request clarification of a specific task that did not arise during orientation and training, or a worker may request a ‘refresher’ for a task that is performed only occasionally—especially when that task is hazardous. When training is seen as an investment, rather than a cost, employers recognize the value in giving workers the extra attention they feel they need.

► Keep records

Be sure to document all orientation and training. Maintaining accurate, up-to-date records is an important part of employer due diligence.