

May 9, 2006

L&I urges job safety for teens as summer hiring season nears

TUMWATER — With Gov. Chris Gregoire declaring May "Safe Jobs for Youth Month" and as the summer hiring season nears, the Washington Department of Labor and Industries (L&I) today urged employers to make job safety for teens a priority.

"For teens, summer jobs are often an introduction to the work world, and they will be eager to succeed," said L&I Director Gary Weeks. "That enthusiasm can put teens at risk of workplace injury because they don't see the risks that would be clear to an adult."

According to state and national data, teens under 18 are injured on the job at a higher rate than adults; L&I has also found that nearly 50 percent of injuries to teens occur during the first six months on the job. Creating safe workplaces for teens includes providing adequate training, following laws that prohibit teens from working with dangerous equipment and, in general, giving them extra supervision and lots of repetition, particularly when they're new to the job.

"We don't want our teenagers to be afraid – we want them to be cautious," Weeks said. "Protecting teens from illness and injury while they are at work requires us all to do our part. L&I gives teens, employers, parents and teachers practical tools for creating safer workplaces."

In 2005, more than 1,100 Washington teens filed workers' compensation claims as a result of injuries. However, teen-worker injuries have declined in recent years in Washington, thanks to efforts by businesses, labor unions, schools, governmental agencies and other organizations. Reported injuries for minors have dropped almost 50 percent during the past decade.

The majority of injuries for teens are burns, cuts, slips and falls, but injuries can cause lifelong disability, even death. Many teens work in retail or restaurant settings that could expose them to risks for robbery and assault. To help employers create a safer restaurant or retail environment, L&I recently produced a tip sheet that includes suggestions about lighting, exit doors and cash-handling techniques, and offers other resources for improving workplace safety. The tip sheet is available online at <http://www.lni.wa.gov/IPUB/FSP0-919-000.pdf>.

Employers who want to hire teens need an updated master business license with a work permit endorsement for hiring minors, and a parent/school authorization form for the teen's work hours and job assignments.

Here are some of the other rules for employers who hire teenage workers:

- In general, 14- and 15-year-olds may perform lighter tasks such as office work, cashiering and stocking shelves, bagging and carrying groceries, janitorial and grounds maintenance (without operating power mowers or cutters), and food service that does not involving cooking or baking duties.
- Work assignments for 16- and 17-year-olds can be less restrictive. Their jobs may include such things as cooking, baking, landscaping, window washing (no more than 10 feet off the ground), maintenance and repair, and amusement-park work. Driving for work purposes is allowed for 17-year-olds only under very limited circumstances. Work on roofs and use of most powered machinery is prohibited by both state and federal regulations.

- Generally, if safety equipment other than a hard hat, eye protection or gloves is required to do the job, then it's not an appropriate job for minors.
- Fourteen- and 15-year-olds can work up to 40 hours a week while school is not in session; 16- and 17-year-olds can work up to 48 hours a week. Overtime-pay requirements would apply for hours worked over 40 in one week.
- All minors are prohibited from working with certain chemicals, pesticides and explosives. In agricultural jobs, additional restrictions, including operating powered equipment, apply only to minors under age 16.

The required forms, plus information about prohibited duties, hours of work and helpful safety resources aimed at teens and their employers, can be found at <http://www.lni.wa.gov/WorkplaceRights/TeenWorkers/>.

###

Media note: An occupational health specialist at L&I who is an expert on teens in the workplace is available for interviews. If interested, contact Barbara Davis, L&I public affairs, 360-902-4216 or daba235@LNI.wa.gov.

You may leave the L&I News list at any time by visiting <http://listserv.wa.gov/archives/lnews.html>
You may also visit the L&I News Center at <http://www.lni.wa.gov/news> to see or search the archives of news releases sent out by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries.