

International  
Labour  
Organization



**Safe Work for Youth Kit**

**TIPS FOR  
YOUNG WORKERS  
IN THE GARMENT INDUSTRY  
IN MYANMAR**

**2019**

**STAY SAFE**



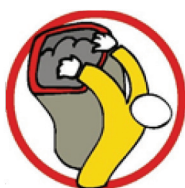
Factory work is often a pathway to success for young workers. Many national and international companies have opened factories in new locations, creating jobs and opportunities for youth to gain skills and work experience. As a young worker in a garment factory you may be assigned to cut, store or transport fabric and garments; sew by hand or on machine; check completed garments or pack the finished products for delivery. This can be good and decent work, but there are hazards and risks in this work that can cause injury or ill-health.

Your employer is responsible for providing a safe workplace, but it is essential that you know the hazards and risks to which you may be exposed and what you can do to keep safe on the job.

## Top job hazards for youth



- **Psychosocial hazards**, due to the nature of the work, including from working long hours, in the same position, sometimes into the night



- **Biological hazards**, including exposure to bacteria, parasites, viruses, and dangerous animals, insects and plants

- **Chemical hazards**, including exposure to gases, dusts, fumes, vapours and liquids. Especially serious are pesticides and fertilisers used in agriculture; paints and solvents in manufacturing; asbestos, silica, thinners, adhesives, and welding fumes in construction.



- **Safety hazards**, including working at height; using dangerous machinery, equipment or tools; driving, riding or working near vehicles; building trenches; walking on slippery surfaces and untidy floors; and working with or close to flammable or explosive materials or substances

- **Physical hazards**, including exposure to harmful physical agents such as noise, vibration, certain types of lighting, extreme temperatures and radiation (including exposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun and from welding operations)

- **Ergonomic hazards**, including lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling things which are too heavy, or jobs which require fast, repetitive movements



## What you should do for stay safe on the job

### KNOW THE LAW

Myanmar Factory Act (Amended 2016). The law says:

#### Article 14

- (a) No one under age 14 shall be employed in a shop or establishment.
- (b) No one under age 16 shall be required to work overtime

#### Article 15

- (a) No one between the age of 14 and 16 may work more than 4 hours in any one day.
- (b) No one shall work between 6 pm and 6 am (night work).
- (d) No one under age 18 shall be allowed to do prescribed hazardous work or in a hazardous workplace.

### GET TRAINED

Your employer is responsible for ensuring you are properly trained to do every task that is part of your job and for showing you which specific hazards to watch out for. You should be trained to use and store potentially hazardous chemicals such as cleaning products safely; trained in safe ways of lifting, carrying, pushing and pulling materials; trained in the safe way to use and store equipment; and trained what to do if there is an emergency such as a fire, robbery / violence, or abuse.

It is your responsibility to follow the employer's instructions and safety rules carefully and to ask questions if you are unsure of what to do.

### ASK

You are a sensible person. So, if something seems unsafe to you, ask about it. If you are not sure how to do something, ask for the instructions to be repeated. If you are still not sure, or afraid that you will make a mistake, ask again until you are confident that you understand how to safely do your job.

If someone bothers or threatens you at work, ask for help right away!

You don't want to appear foolish by asking too many questions, but remember, it is better to ask than to make a mistake! And it is much better to ask questions than to get injured or to lose your job!

Do not be shy—ask.



## What your employer does for your safety

- Makes sure there is effective ventilation to safely remove harmful substances from the air you breathe, e.g. a dust extraction system.
- Makes sure all equipment is safe: all moving parts are effectively guarded so that you cannot get clothes, hair, or hands caught in moving machinery. Makes sure exposure to noise is effectively controlled.
- Provides handling equipment such as carts or trolleys for moving cloth, finished goods, and other heavy loads so they don't need to be lifted and carried by hand.
- Does not make you work with fabric that has been treated with hazardous chemicals.
- Provides written contracts for all young workers and does not make them work overtime or without rest breaks

### TRUE STORIES

Many young workers work in small or large garment factories. This work can be tiring and stressful. There are many potential hazards to be aware of. Find out what to do so you do not get hurt, like these young workers did....

*"I work in a factory that makes blue jeans. When I come home from work, I am covered with blue dust, and cough up blue mucus. My nose is always stuffed up and I never seem to stop coughing."*

*"I run a sewing machine all day, sitting on a hard stool. After a*

*few hours, my leg starts to feel numb from pressing the foot pedal. My neck hurts all the time from bending over the machine. I don't know how long I can do this job."*

*"I am the person who removes spots from the finished shirts. I use a cleaning chemical, but I don't know what it is. There are ten of us in a small room—I usually have a headache from the chemical smell by the end of the day."*

## How to control the risks from job hazards

### MUSCULO-SKELETAL INJURY

- Use mechanical lifting equipment or trolleys to move heavy items.
- Get help from others when lifting heavy items.
- Remember "SLIM" (Safe Lifting Methods)

Squat to pick up the object  
Lift using your leg muscles not your back,  
In close, against your body  
Move your feet to turn, don't twist the body

- Find a comfortable position to work in. Change your position frequently during the day.
- Use a seat that is the right height. Add cushions or a footrest if it is not adjustable.
- Take regular rest breaks, even short ones, to stretch.
- Set up your work station so that everything is at elbow level and easy to reach without twisting.
- Stand on a mat. Even cardboard will help.
- Change position, move around, or shift weight from one foot to the other.

### MACHINE INJURIES

- Use anti-cut gloves when you work with cutting tools. Your employer should provide these.
- Wear clothes that are not loose-fitting because if not they can get caught in moving parts of machines.

### FALLS

- Ensure good housekeeping by removing items cluttering the floor in your work



areas or walk ways.

- Do not work at heights without correct fall protection in place.
- Make sure any floor openings, stairways and ledges are properly guarded to protect against falls.
- Never run or move too fast.
- Do not carry items too tall for you to see over.
- Wear suitable shoes with non-slip soles and toe protection.

## **DUST**

- If the work is dusty, use an appropriate dust mask and ensure it fits you. This should be provided by your employer.
- Clean up dusty areas regularly, with a wet mop if possible or a vacuum with a high efficiency particulate filter.

## **ELECTRIC SHOCK**

- Do not touch or use a machine that looks damaged (can you see the live wires) or is wet. Tell your employer or supervisor about it.

## **HARASSMENT**

- If you are being repeatedly yelled at or harassed, get help from a worker rep.
- If someone demands sexual favours, call a co-worker and inform your boss

## **NOISE**

- If there is so much noise that you need to raise your voice for normal conversation, your hearing can be damaged. Wear ear plugs or other hearing protection provided by your employer.

## **HEAT & ILLNESS**

- Keep hydrated – if you're thirsty you're not hydrated. Take appropriate rest breaks out of the heat.
- If you start to feel dizzy or ill, tell a co-worker. Get out of the heat, drink water, and put water on your head and arms to cool down.
- Wash your hands with soap before eating and drinking.







# **FIVE WAYS TO STAY SAFE**



Garment manufacturing is a source of good jobs. As it is becoming increasingly vital to the national economy and in Myanmar's trade with other countries, it is likely to provide good employment for years to come. An added benefit, as seen in other countries, is that working in garment manufacturing can be an important channel for women's empowerment. Therefore, this could be a good occupation for you in years to come if you stay safe now! But there are hazards in garment manufacturing, so it is really important for you to know the risks, your rights under the law, and your responsibilities. Find out what to do so you do not get injured, like these young workers did.

### TRUE STORIES

*There were 28 of us doing different kinds of garment manufacturing work. One day some people came to give us medical tests. We were asked to blow into a device to test our breathing. It turned out that 21 of us already had obstructive lung disease although we were still young. They said it was because there was a lot of dust in the air from the cloth we were working on. (Awan, Pakistan, 2012)*

*"I was always tired after a working day. I always had a headache. If I had a headache during work I didn't tell anybody. I would just go on working. In the factories targets are set; the girls feel the pressure of making this target. When they feel bad at work, there is often no possibility to take a rest." (Lieten, Bangladesh, 2010)*

*"...main hazard ... we call it the 'mental issue'. Managers curse the workers every day to make them work harder. Furthermore they are often threatened by section managers to decrease salary, be dismissed, and not allowed to work overtime, because workers need overtime to receive enough salary for their livelihoods ... Therefore workers are concerned daily about job security, which is often more important than health and safety. That is why they have constant stress in their minds." (Kong, Cambodia, 2005)*

Are you a young worker - under 18 years of age? You are legally old enough to work if you are above 14 in Myanmar, but did you know that if the work or working conditions are hazardous, you could be considered child labour?

As a young worker, you have a right to special protection. ILO Conventions and the laws in most countries require employers to provide a safe workplace and work that is safe for you. Not all employers know about or follow these laws, and the laws are not always enforced. So it is important for you to know how to protect yourself and to know what your employer should provide. These five steps will help you stay safe.



# 5 WAYS TO STAY SAFE IN GARMENT FACTORIES

## 1. Look for hazards

Be aware of the hazards in each of the tasks you are asked to do. Some of them may be obvious and can be a risk to you right away. Others may be “hidden” and might not affect you immediately.

Think about some of the ways you might get injured or suffer ill-health in your particular job.

- Do you use sharp objects, such as needles or cutters?
- Do you lift, push or pull rolls of cloth or other heavy materials?
- Do you clean equipment or fix it if it needs repair?
- Do you operate any powered equipment like a sewing machine?
- Do you breathe fumes or dust?
- Do you work in a high noise area where you have to raise your voice to hear normal conversation, such as near noisy machinery?
- Do you have to work at a fast pace or do the same movement over and over?
- Do you ever get abuse or improper suggestions from co-workers or management?
- Do you ever work alone or at night?
- Do you work for long hours, overtime, or more than 40 hours a week?

These are just a few examples. Every job has its own health and safety hazards, and some of them are hard to spot. Learn to look for them, but remember, it’s your employer’s responsibility to make sure the work you do is appropriate for your age.

Pay attention to warning signs that the place where you are working might be unsafe. There may be a problem if:

- Other workers are getting injured or suffering ill-health
- There is no regular induction or on-going training programme
- Equipment is not properly maintained or electrical leads are loose or not connected properly so you can see or could touch the live wires
- Machines do not have safety guards over the dangerous parts
- Chemicals are stored in containers with no labels and not securely closed
- There is no action taken against allegations of sexual harassment
- Workers are allowed to take unsafe shortcuts to save time
- Housekeeping in the work area is poor with slip and trip hazards present
- There are no adequate welfare facilities with soap to wash and clean water



- The supervisor shouts at the workers or is disrespectful
- There is no health and safety committee or union Workers' Rep
- Fire exits are locked or blocked
- Workers are expected to work long hours or at night

## 2. Know your rights

There are international guidelines that protect young workers. These say that the conditions where you work must be safe and that you must not be asked to do work which is physically or psychologically hazardous. These international guidelines say that you should not:

- Work in confined spaces, such as where cloth is being dyed, sanded or packed
- Use powered machinery, equipment, or tools
- Work near or with hazardous chemicals, or be exposed to high noise levels, or vibration
- Work in extreme heat or cold
- Work alone, long hours or late at night

National laws and local regulations set limits on the hours and times of day that you can work. These are intended to ensure that you have time for school or adequate rest. Your employer must follow these rules and should also:

- Provide a safe and healthy place to work
- Provide training, including information about potential exposure to chemicals and other hazardous substances
- Provide personal protective equipment such as suitable gloves, dust masks, or hearing protection
- Pay for medical care if you get hurt or sick because of your job
- Pay at least the minimum wage
- Prohibit harassment, bullying, and discrimination
- Allow you to join or organize a union

Your employer cannot punish or fire you if you:

- Refuse to perform hazardous work activities
- Report an occupational hazard or injury
- File a complaint with a government agency
- Ask for information about a potential work hazard



## 3. Get training

You should know how to do your job and know how to do it safely. Your employer should train you to do every task that's part of your job so you can do it without getting injured. For example, you should be shown how to:

- Avoid exposure to hazardous dusts, fumes or chemicals
- Lift, carry, push or pull heavy things in a safe manner, using mechanical aids where possible
- Use cutting tools safely
- Operate, repair and clean tools or machines in a safe manner
- Handle bullying or abuse by someone while at work
- Respond to violent situations or crises in a safe manner
- Know what to do when there is a fire or someone gets injured

Keep yourself from getting injured. Ask for more training! Always ask questions if you are not sure how to do something. If you do not get the training you need from the person in charge, ask someone else. Ask a co-worker, union representative, teacher, or older worker. You can say:

“I think I understand how to do this, but can you watch to make sure I’m doing everything right?”

“I’m still not sure how to do this. Can you show me once more?”

## 4. Follow safety rules

Training won't keep you safe if you don't follow all the safety rules afterwards!

- Do every task safely, the way you have been trained
- Keep work areas clean and free from clutter
- Don't drink alcohol or use drugs; don't try to work when you are very tired
- Report any health and safety hazards to your employer or supervisor

What if something happens?

- For every type of emergency, know what to do, who to call or where to go
- If you get injured, tell the person in charge right away.
- If necessary, go to a health clinic or doctor.
- Inform the Factories and General Labour Laws Inspection Department (FGLLID) and fill out an injury form
- Tell your parent or another family member.



## 5. Ask questions and get help

If you are not clear about what to do or if something worries you, ask for help. The person in charge will prefer that you ask questions (especially if done in a respectful way) rather than make a mistake which can cost them money. Co-workers also may be able to help you.

*“I really like working here but I am not sure about how to do this task that I have been assigned. Could you show me how to do it?”*

*“These boxes are heavy and I don’t want to hurt my back. Can I ask a co-worker to help me? It will be safer and quicker.”*

*“According to what I learned at school, I think I’m being asked to do tasks I am too young for. But I am afraid the supervisor will think I am lazy. I will ask one of the other workers for advice.”*

What if you need more help?

If the person in charge does not help, or if you are afraid you will get fired or punished if you speak up you can:

- talk to one of the adult workers whom you feel you can trust
- talk to a Workers’ Representative or another union member
- talk to your parents, a teacher, or a community worker
- call or write to the FGLLID or other agency in charge of worker protection



## Key messages

1. The garment sector is export-oriented. Labour standards in garment manufacture must therefore clearly conform to international standards. An employer cited for violating labour standards potentially jeopardizes its business contracts and can harm the reputation of the enterprise and the industry for many years.
2. All workers – long term, short term, temporary, part-time and subcontractors – should have written contracts that specify the amount of pay, pay arrangements, work hours/day, days/week, and employment benefits as well as what duties the worker is required to do and how they will be managed.
3. The buyer company shares responsibility for monitoring the workers and working conditions throughout its supply chains. This means that buyers need to know the working conditions under which supplies are sourced.
4. A worker safety committee, including a representative specially trained to be attentive to young worker needs and vulnerabilities, is strongly advised.
5. Traditional customs of respect may make it hard for young workers to raise safety concerns to elders and management. To improve working conditions and improve safety, employers should make particular efforts to reduce barriers to communication, especially for younger workers.
6. Because of the large proportion of women in the garment industry, additional information directed at them is advised. Additional questions addressing gender issues are included in the risk assessment form.
7. The main safety hazards faced by young workers in the garment sector are:
  - a. Fire
  - b. Chemicals used in dyes and fabric processing
  - c. Long work hours
  - d. Heat stress
  - e. Sharp tools and unguarded machinery
  - f. Ergonomic injuries (repetitive motion and manual handling)

**Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work  
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