

International  
Labour  
Organization

# Working with **Y**outh

**Tips for managers of construction sites  
with young workers in Myanmar**

**Myanmar Programme On the Elimination of Child Labour  
(My-PEC)**

**KEEP THEM SAFE**



# Working with Youth

Tips for managers of construction sites  
with young workers in Myanmar

This booklet is for owners, managers and supervisors of construction sites where young workers are employed, especially those between 14 and 18 years old. It describes what you need to know when hiring and managing adolescent workers and how to improve the work site so it is profitable, productive, and safe.

Myanmar Programme On the Elimination of Child Labour (My-PEC)  
Fundamental Principles and Right at Work (Fundamentals)  
International Labour Organization (ILO)

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**GENERAL  
GUIDELINES**

**KEEP THEM SAFE**





## A message to you, the construction manager, supervisor or owner . . .

You play an important role in Myanmar. You create jobs. You contribute to the economy. You provide the buildings that the economy requires and that people will live in. And, you help young workers gain skills that will last a lifetime. Youth of today are your clients of tomorrow.

But youth need to be trained well and protected from work situations that they are not ready for yet. If they are well guided at the start, they will be set for a lifetime of productive work. Whether you have youth doing light work, serving an apprenticeship, or those over the legal working age doing regular work, this booklet will tell you what you need to know. It provides health and safety information so that you know how to protect your younger workers.<sup>1</sup>

Most important: The tips in this booklet are not just good for young workers; they are good for business. It has been proven time and time again, that the simple suggestions given here help to transform a business in many ways. The sites where your company works will not only become safer and more pleasant places to work, they will actually become more profitable.

## The young worker is our future

The commercial world is changing fast. Construction firms like yours used to be completely independent; now, even small ones must conform to new rules and building standards. Before, no one paid much attention to the situation of construction workers, but now, buyers are demanding proof that the buildings are made with good materials under safe working conditions. Before, job experience was enough; now it is crucial for young people to have a basic education and specialized skills in order get decent jobs. There are now new machinery, new products, new markets, and new materials to work with. An owner of a construction firm must prepare for tomorrow, not for yesterday!

Equipping a young worker for the future will yield rewards many times over. A worker you train yourself knows the business. There is no better way to build loyalty and trust. Invest in the future. Invest in a young worker!

Read through this booklet, and see what makes sense to you. Then set up a plan to make changes in your own work site step by step. Do a “walk-through” periodically using the checklist at the end.

### Outline of the booklet:

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**Section I:** General guidelines about young workers

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**Section II:** Specific suggestions for reducing risks at the construction site

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**Section III:** Checklist

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**Section IV:** Resources

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1 The content of the *Safe Work for Youth* materials was prepared by international health and safety professionals but as no document can cover all circumstances, the user must take responsibility for applying this information.

# KEY FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUNG WORKERS

## They are good workers!

Young workers are a great asset to your construction business because they:

- are energetic
- learn fast
- have quick reflexes
- have good eyesight and hearing
- appreciate the chance to learn skills and are anxious to do well
- are enthusiastic with a great work ethic
- may have some new ideas for helping your construction business improve
- are adaptable and flexible, often able to work part-time or on weekends or outside school hours when you do not require a full time worker

Because there are many advantages to hiring young workers, you want to use them to best advantage. Choose tasks which draw on these strengths.

## They need attention.

Young workers deserve special consideration because they are:

- still growing and their organs, muscles, and bones are still developing
- more sensitive to chemicals, toxic fumes, dust, and noise than adults
- quick to move — sometimes without thinking — and more likely to take risks
- less experienced and need supervision and training
- bored more easily and may let their attention wander

Although generally strong, smart and eager, young workers must be kept away from jobs or parts of the workshop where they will be exposed to danger. It's a fact: When young workers and adult workers are doing the same tasks, the young workers are more likely to get injured.

## They are young people ...

not machines! Consider the young worker as a "whole person". Pay attention to ...

- whether the young worker has completed compulsory schooling, has a school certificate and has learned to read, write, and do arithmetic well.
- how the young worker behaves and seems to feel: anxious? sad? shy?
- whether the young worker is sufficiently well-fed and clothed.
- what the young worker wants to learn and her/his hopes for the future.

If something is lacking in one of these areas, the employer or supervisor can often provide or direct the young person to the kind of help that will set him or her on the right track for the future.

# KEY FACTS TO KNOW ABOUT OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY

Workplace accidents and illnesses can have tragic consequences for workers and their families. They can also have a very bad impact on your business reputation as well as through temporary or permanent loss of workers, disruption to the work, medical costs, or loss of customers.

**In contrast, safe workplaces are more efficient, more productive, less likely to lose staff at crucial times and are a valued part of the community.** As an employer it is worth your while to make sure that your workplace is safe for all your workers!

## FOUR GOLDEN RULES

1

Know the legal age for regular work. In Myanmar, it is 14 years. Do not let anyone below that age work or “help out” or even be present on the construction site!

2

Give every young worker a work contract. A written and signed contract – even for part-time or single day workers -- protects you, as well as your young employees and helps avoid misunderstandings by making clear the rights and obligations of both.

3

Train and supervise. It is your obligation to teach young workers what they need to know to do the job well, and how to stay safe while doing it. All young workers, including apprentices and trainees, must work under close supervision.

4

Do not let anyone under 18 do hazardous work. If the working conditions or the work itself is dangerous, only let adults do it. Keep young workers away from parts of the site and machinery that are hazardous.

# WHAT IS HAZARDOUS?

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182, adopted by most countries including Myanmar, it is: “...**work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children**” and includes:

- **work at heights (roofs, trees, walls) or on equipment where they might fall (ladders, scaffolding, steep slopes)**
- **work underground (caves, tunnels) or where there are holes and pits**
- **work in or under water (diving, standing in water or on damp ground for more than a few minutes)**
- **work in small spaces (tunnels, boxes, refrigerators)**
- **work alone away from others, or isolated from other young people**
- **lifting heavy items or carrying loads for long distances**
- **operating or working close to heavy or dangerous machinery, including**
  - **equipment that cuts or crushes**
  - **equipment that is motorized or powered by an engine**
  - **machines that can trap the hand, foot, hair or clothing**
- **work for long hours or at night**
- **work with toxic chemicals or in areas close to where they are being used, as well as in heavy dust or smoke**
- **work in places where there is risk of crime going to and from work**
- **work demanding heavy responsibility for others’ safety or goods**

As you can see, most construction sites have many of these hazards. However, there are many, many tasks that young workers can do, and do well. The challenge is to know where to draw the line. This booklet will help you do this in ways that make good business sense.

## GENERAL TIPS & GUIDELINES

If you have read this far, it shows you are a concerned person who wants to have a legal and safe worksite that anyone will recognize right away as a good place for young people to work. This reputation will help you attract and keep customers and help you attract good workers. You will become known as a good construction company and be more competitive through efficiency, good quality work, and reduced accidents. The ideas and solutions provided in this booklet do not come out of thin air. They have been developed and tested time and time again with thousands of construction sites like yours.

Following are some general tips for working with youth on a construction site.

### ASSIGN EVERY YOUNG WORKER TO A SUPERVISOR

TIP

Young workers need guidance, especially at the beginning. Most injuries occur when no one is paying attention to them. Make sure the supervisor who assigns the work knows the tasks that young workers should not be allowed to do and takes responsibility for them!

### SHOW . . . DON'T JUST TELL (BE A GOOD EXAMPLE YOURSELF!)

TIP

Young workers learn by seeing and doing. They need to be surrounded by examples of good work practices. If they see people they respect acting safely and responsibly, they will do the same. Supervisors, above all, must set a good example. A good way to build good work habits is to take young workers on a walk-through inspection of the whole construction site so that they can learn to spot hazards and unsafe practices. Young workers are sometimes shy. Encourage them to ask questions and to tell you if there's a problem or if instructions are unclear. Observe them while they work and correct any mistakes. Check them periodically and retrain them regularly.

### DO NOT ASSUME THAT YOUNG WORKERS KNOW THE RULES

TIP

Young workers may look like adults on the outside but on the inside, both physically and emotionally, they are not yet fully mature. They have a tendency to be impatient or to take risks. They may jump too quickly into tasks that require careful critical thinking. They want to please and do not want to appear stupid. As a result they may take on tasks they do not really know how to do, or let other workers talk them into doing things they have not yet been trained for. Give them clear instructions for each task, especially unfamiliar ones.



## DO NOT RELY ONLY ON PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

TIP

If a task is so hazardous that adult workers need to use equipment such as respirators or goggles, this is a sign that it is too risky for young workers to do ... or even to work alongside. An exception is a paid internship or apprentice program where the young worker is being formally trained on a particular task or piece of equipment and is being closely supervised. In this case, be absolutely sure that the PPE fits the young workers and that they know how and when to use it. **PPE cannot make a hazardous task safe!**

On the other hand, an employer should ensure that young workers have – and use – basic protective garments as needed (for example, hats to protect from sun, gloves to protect their hands, and shoes to protect their feet from cuts or falling objects).

## SET UP A SAFETY AND HEALTH PROGRAM

TIP

Make sure you know the hazards and risks of all jobs and work areas on your construction site. Involve every worker in developing the program, including young workers. Don't just focus on the physical environment. Identify all situations that can lead to fatigue, stress, or harassment. See that the first aid box, fire extinguishers, and other emergency devices are ready to use and that young workers know where they are and what to do. Prepare them for all kinds of emergency: accidents, fires, violent situations, etc. Show them escape routes and explain where to go if they need medical treatment. Demonstrate the safety precautions to take for each task.

In Yangon, some new apartments were being built in a crowded area. A group of boys came to the supervisor and asked for work. There was a deadline to get these buildings ready and the supervisor was under a lot of stress. He was in a hurry and needed some extra hands to haul building materials to the site so he said "sure" and pointed off in the direction of a pile of brick.

What he didn't know was that one of the boys was only 12 and none of the boys had ever been on a construction site before. All were wearing sandals.

A few hours later, he heard a scream of pain. One of the boys had gotten hit by a forklift that was backing up. The driver was swearing and everyone stopped their work and ran to the spot. Luckily the child only suffered bruises. But the building inspector happened to be on site at the time of the accident and, when he found out that one of the young workers was underage, he cited the manager and the owner which incurs a fine of at least 20,000kyat.

A few minutes at the beginning would have saved the manager hours of lost time getting everyone back to work, taking the child to the clinic, and dealing with his parents, not to mention at the court paying a fine...





**SPECIFIC  
SUGGESTIONS**

**KEEP THEM SAFE**



# WORK CONTRACTS

- ✓ Do sign a written contract with young workers – even if they are day laborers -- and make sure they clearly understand its terms
- ✓ Do give them the same amount of leave you would give to adult workers (e.g. daily rest breaks, vacation, sick leave, or maternity leave)
- ✓ Do follow proper procedures if the young worker needs to be fired

A contract really helps to avoid misunderstandings. It can be short – just a page – but it should include these four points:

## 1. Info about the worker:

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- Name
- Age
- Contact information for parents/guardian
- Home address

## 2. Info about the firm:

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- Name of the company
- Address of the company

## 3. Info about the work:

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- Tasks to be done
- Name of supervisor

## 4. Info about the contract

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- Start date and duration (or end date, if time-limited)
- Days per week and hours of work per day
- Amount of pay and when it will be paid

Never rely on a verbal agreement. It is easy to forget what you have said and agreed to. A written contract reduces conflicts and disputes at the work place. It ensures the rights and obligations of both you and your young workers. If there is no contract it may take a lot of time to settle the dispute, making it more difficult to get the work done, and reducing your profits.

**TIP****INFORM YOUNG WORKERS OF THEIR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Young workers have rights. They are eligible for benefits that other workers get, such as breaks and medical care. Make sure that all young workers know this. At the same time, make sure they know exactly what they or their families are expected to pay for, if anything. Young workers or their families should NOT be made to pay for supplies, protective clothing or equipment — that is the employer's responsibility.

**TIP****PAY YOUNG WORKERS PROMPTLY**

When young workers are paid on time, it contributes to a positive atmosphere in the worksite. It will enhance production as no time will be wasted in following up the salary and other allowances. It will help maintain a smooth relationship between employer and employee.

**A construction company in Mon was used to paying its workers only when it had cash on hand; young workers got paid last and so sometimes they didn't get paid at all. As a result, the company was always losing good workers to other construction sites and fell behind in getting the work done.**

# TIME & HOURS

- ✓ **Do not allow young workers to work overtime**
- ✓ **Do give young workers lunch breaks and rest breaks**
- ✓ **Don't let young workers work at night or travel home after dark**

Every business wants to meet its deadlines. But making people work overtime or long hours will reduce quality and increase the number of mistakes and injuries. Mistakes and injuries cost you money and cause delays! Although many young workers are more than willing to sign up for extra work in the hope of getting overtime pay, do not be tempted to keep them on. Long hours can make even the simplest work hazardous.

## WATCH THAT YOUNG WORKERS DO NOT WORK OVERTIME

TIP

Working long hours is a main cause of injury in young people so they should not be allowed to work longer, even if they want to. Adolescents require more sleep than adults, and as much or more sleep than younger children. Therefore, they should not work more than 8 hours in 24. Have them fill in a time log each day.

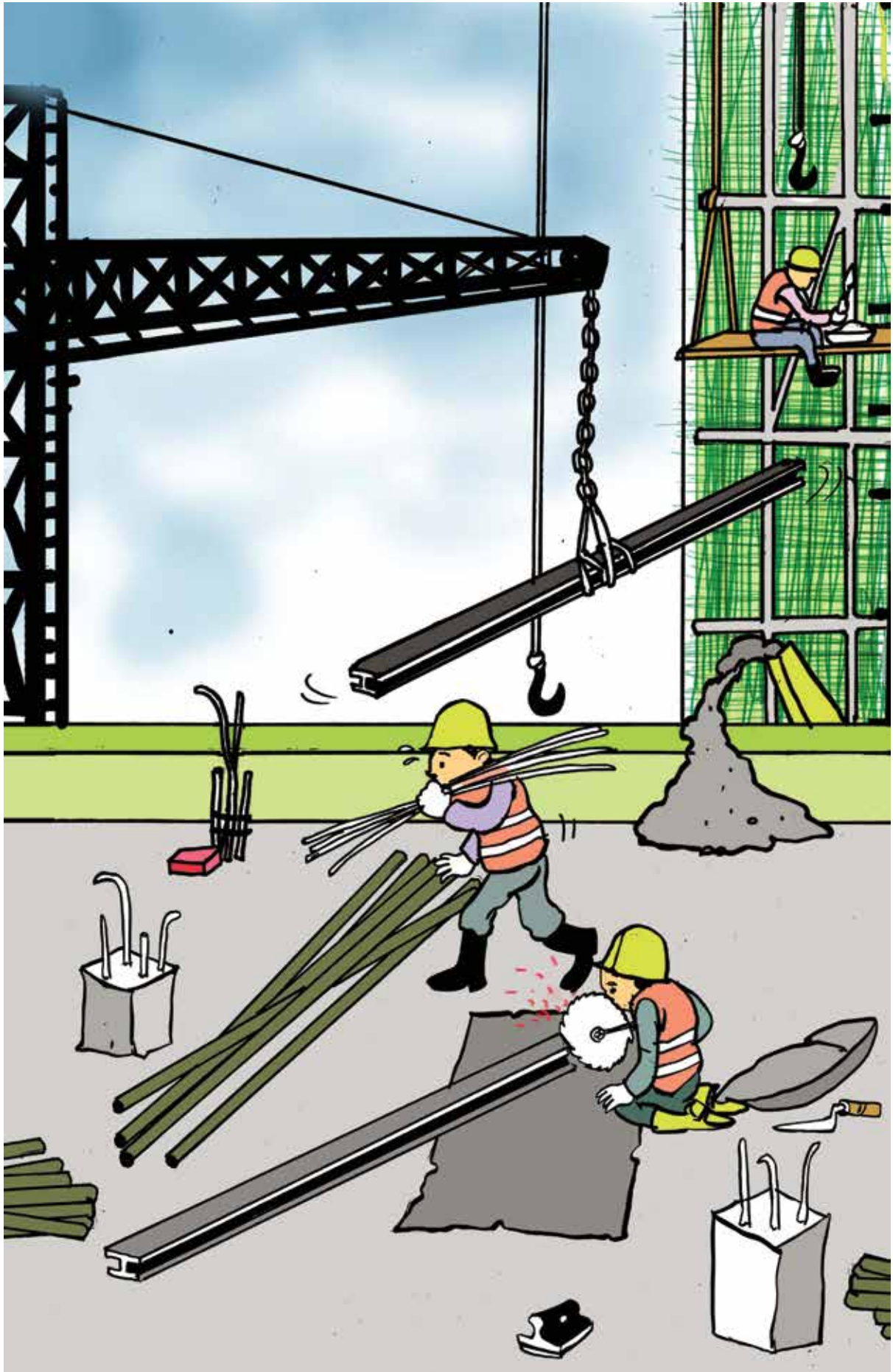
**In Myanmar, the current law says that children can only work in factories for 4 hours per day. However, this law is being updated and will likely be more precise about the number of hours that young people can work at what ages.**

Working at night poses additional safety risks, particularly for girls. As an employer, your moral responsibility for your workers does not end at the gate of the construction site. You need to make sure that young workers can reach home safely after work.

## COUNT THE TOTAL HOURS YOUNG EMPLOYEES ARE WORKING

TIP

Many young workers – especially girls – often have a second “job” at home in the form of domestic tasks such as child care, cooking, shopping, hauling water and wood, running errands. They may also be going to school. These additional pressures combine to make young workers tired, which places them at increased risk for mistakes, injuries and illnesses. Worker fatigue, in turn, may harm the productivity of your business. Make sure that young workers, like everyone, have some time to relax and time to spend outside of work.



# HARASSMENT & VIOLENCE

- ✓ **Do write a policy against harassment and violence at the construction site**
- ✓ **Do model good behaviors yourself**
- ✓ **Do address harassment or violence immediately if it occurs**

Young workers work better when they enjoy their work and have good relations with their co-workers and supervisors. They perform better when they are treated in a respectful way. A respectful environment is free from harassment and violence.

Harassment is an act or comment imposed on someone who is not in a position to complain. It can slow down production, lead to high employee turnover, create a bad reputation in the community, and cause a downturn in business. In the past, some construction managers thought it was normal to slap or shout at young workers to “keep them in line” or “show them their place”. Now we know that this is not an effective way to discipline workers. No form of harassment or violence is acceptable in the workplace!

For the individual concerned, harassment can result in extreme suffering — both physical and psychological. The physical problems can take many forms including headaches, sleep problems, and stomach disorders. On the psychological side, it can make a young person depressed, lose motivation, and in extreme cases, take his own life.

## DO NOT IGNORE ANY SIGN OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

TIP

Sexual harassment includes:

- unwelcome touching or patting
- staring or leering
- suggestive remarks, rude comments, or telling “dirty” stories and jokes
- sexually suggestive wall posters or calendars
- hints, requests or demands for sexual favors
- rape

Myanmar culture does not condone sexual harassment, but it is still far too common and the effects are serious. A young person can bear the scars of sexual abuse for a lifetime. Even when there has been no physical contact, there can be psychological damage in the form of shame or guilt although the young person was not the one at fault. Religious sensitivities can be particularly strong on this matter. It can have a devastating effect on a young person’s whole life when an unwanted pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease such as an HIV infection results.

The business also suffers. Co-workers may act as if they ‘don’t see’ but they do notice and may well be afraid, concerned, or less productive as a result. If they talk about it at lunch or after work with family and friends, this will have an impact on your company’s reputation, as well as their respect for you as a manager or owner.

Most of the time the harasser is in a more powerful position than the one being harassed. Supervisors or others in authority think they can get sexual favors from young workers by using threats and intimidation. Young girl workers are at special risk of sexual harassment and abuse, but boys are by no means spared.

## **TIP** **WARN WORKERS THAT ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE ARE UNACCEPTABLE**

When we think of violence we think of blows, cuffs, and slaps. But there is also verbal violence and more subtle kinds of attack. For example:

- humiliation, insulting, name-calling and ridicule
- shouting, swearing, isolating the young person or ignoring them
- damage to personal belongings

You may not think non-physical harassment is serious but it is. It can end up in physical violence. It can – and almost always does – seriously damage the morale of the workforce.

## **TIP** **IDENTIFY YOUNG WORKERS WHO MIGHT BE VULNERABLE TO HARASSMENT OR VIOLENCE**

Whatever the type of harassment or violence, the situation or the cause, it is up to you to stop it, or better yet, prevent it from happening in the first place. Here are steps that will help prevent harassment:

- Identify the young workers whose sex, race, ethnic background, age, or religion makes them appear different from the others and who may be at extra risk.
- Talk to young workers periodically to make sure that they are not facing problems.
- Keep an eye on them to detect changes in their behavior, mood and motivation.
- Ensure young workers are not working in dark areas of the site or alone away from others.

## **TIP** **DEVELOP A WRITTEN POLICY**

Having a policy against violence at the construction site sends a strong message that this will not be tolerated. A written policy brings the issue into the open, allowing discussion and lets everyone know what to expect. Most construction companies do not have formal policies. However, because harassment, especially sexual harassment, is often hidden and considered shameful, it may continue for a long time and damage the atmosphere at the site unless people know that it will be punished. A written policy gives them confidence to act against it. You must be sure that whatever is written in the policy is something you are willing and able to enforce, no matter who is discovered to be the harasser – even the boss or a key foreman.

The policy should include the following points:



## The policy should include the following points

1. a clear definition of harassment and violence, especially sexual harassment
2. how to make a complaint if something happens
3. what disciplinary measures will be taken
4. a guarantee that all complaints will be treated confidentially and someone who complains about harassment or violence will not suffer as a result

The last point is especially important for young workers who may otherwise be afraid of reporting abuses for fear of further harassment or losing their jobs. Investigations into complaints of harassment and violence must be fair and independent as the accusations may be false and serious damage can be done. The complaint procedures should be realistic and not too complex. Complaints can often be handled informally. Sometimes it helps if someone is designated as a focal point for complaints to whom the workers can talk and get resolution of the problem. It is very important to minimize gossip and blame. Make sure all employees know the policy and display it prominently.

### DON'T HESITATE WHEN AN INCIDENT OCCURS

TIP

Harassment is usually not a one-time occurrence. It is usually repeated and it gets worse and more entrenched each time it is repeated. A manager or supervisor who fails to take action at the first sign of harassment sends a message that the behavior is acceptable. If an incident of harassment or violence does occur at the site, respond immediately.

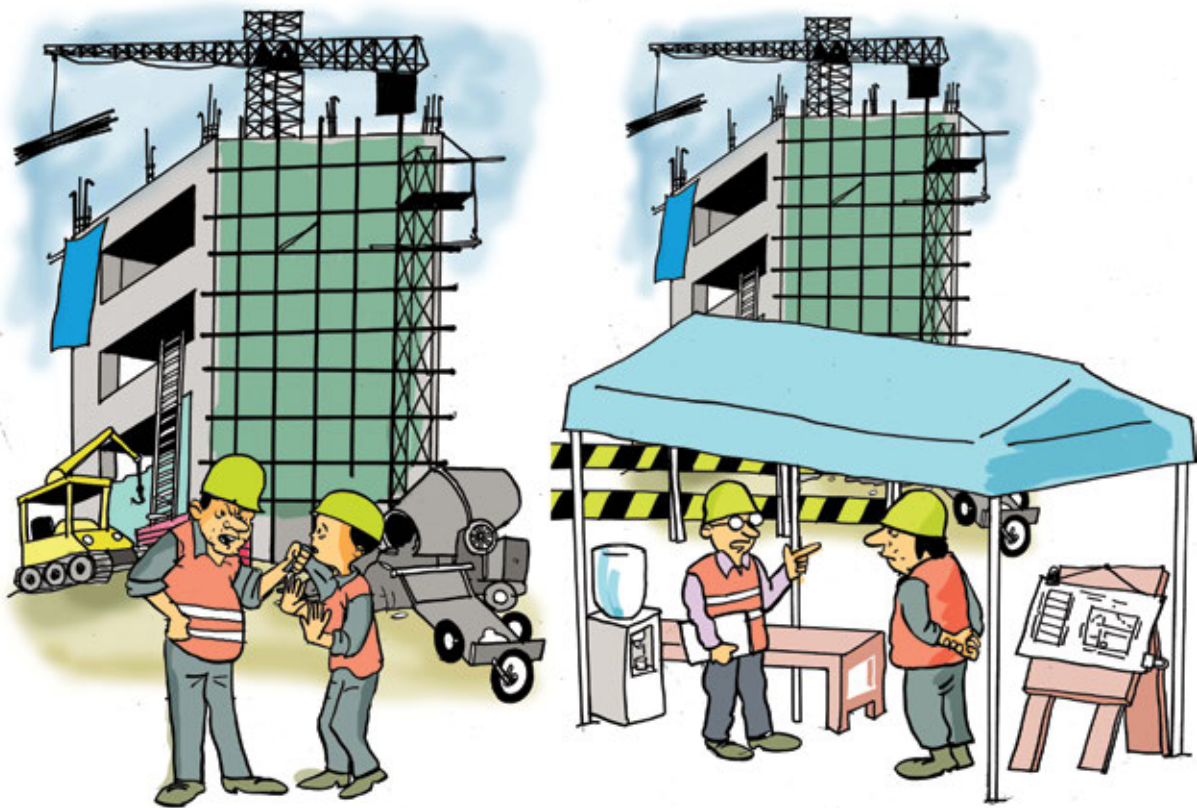
The first action to take is to be sympathetic and supportive of the victim.

The second step is to enforce the disciplinary measures written in the policy. If you do not do this, the policy will have no meaning and all the work you have done is of little value; people will not heed the policy. It will be only words on paper. Depending on the seriousness of the harassment, assess whether it is sufficient to reduce the contacts between the victim and the harasser or whether the harasser will need to be fired. If possible, give them a second chance while still taking action to discipline them. Follow up regularly to ensure that the harassment has stopped.

Eliminating chances for harassment or violence to occur on your construction site is not only ethically and morally right but it also makes good business sense. Harassment has a bad effect on teamwork. All in all, it costs you money, destroys creativity, and erodes employee morale. The bottom line is that harassment and violence can ruin your business.

**The five guiding principles for creating a respectful work environment are:**

- 1** Be vigilant for any type of workplace harassment and violence
- 2** Keep an eye on those most vulnerable to it.
- 3** Establish a policy to prevent and address harassment problems.
- 4** Post the policy where it can be easily seen and sensitize all the workers.
- 5** Show that you take the policy seriously. Model good behavior yourself and take action at the first sign of violence or harassment.



# STRESS

- ✓ **Do keep watch for signs of stress**
- ✓ **Do take steps to reduce the causes of stress**
- ✓ **Don't allow a work environment that young workers fear**

Young workers are often under greater stress at work than people realize. They are learning new skills. They are trying to get the work done on time. And they are struggling to meet the employer's expectations in terms of quality. In short, they are trying to prove themselves.

If you add to that other types of stress, such as long working hours with few rest breaks plus pressures from family or domestic chores, the young person rapidly becomes overloaded. Add to this, hassles from other workers or even a tense, fearful atmosphere at work, and the situation becomes overwhelming.

## GIVE YOUNG WORKERS SOME MEASURE OF CONTROL

TIP

Because they are young and inexperienced, young workers are usually given little say or control over their work situation. They may have no access to their earnings, no privacy, no choice about whether or not they work or what type of work to do. Knowing this, a wise manager or supervisor will do simple things to give the young worker some sense of control over her/his work and life, for example, choices over which task to do, which adult worker to work with, or what time to take a rest break.

## TREAT STRESS AS A SERIOUS ISSUE

TIP

High levels of work-related stress are not just unpleasant, they can cause illness, accidents, and violence. Because stress interferes with sleep, it compounds the effect of other factors such as inadequate food, fast-paced work, exposure to germs, and many others. Remember, even though the physical work may not be dangerous, a work situation that causes high levels of stress among young workers is to be considered "hazardous work" in the legal sense.

One factor that is frequently forgotten is that, all too often, young people are carrying a heavy burden of family responsibilities. They may already be supporting a spouse and children. In a household where the father is ill or incapacitated, they may be the sole support for an unknown number of relatives. As a result, they may feel desperate to keep the job and will agree to almost any terms or conditions, often at great risk to their own health and future.

## TIP A PARTNER CAN EASE ENTRY AND TRAINING

One technique that has been used by others to reduce stress in the workplace is to assign each new young worker a "buddy" or mentor. Sometimes this is a more experienced young worker. This mentor answers questions – particularly the simple ones that a young worker may be too embarrassed to ask of the boss, helps with the hands-on training and especially the practice of new skills, and offers safety tips.

The atmosphere or mood on the work site profoundly influences the productivity of young workers. Creating a positive workplace climate by making small improvements in many areas can help to create a better, more efficient and competitive business.



# MATERIALS HANDLING

- ✓ **Do not let young workers use mechanical lifting equipment**
- ✓ **Do train young workers not to lift heavy material above shoulder level**

Construction work involves working with heavy items: stone, bricks, wood planks, wire, cement, Improving the ways these materials are stored and moved about can reduce the risk to young workers, increase productivity and improve the quality of the building. These tips are generally low-cost and can dramatically improve the “look” of your site.

## IF IN DOUBT, TAKE IT OUT

TIP

Leaving waste or unused materials, stock or equipment around creates safety hazards and reduces the space available to move around. The more cluttered your site is, the more likely it is that tools will be lost, materials will be damaged, and accidents will occur. Workers will waste valuable time looking for things. It sounds simple, but many businesses like yours have found that just improving housekeeping at the worksite has dramatically improved their productivity.

Young workers need to be trained on good housekeeping procedures as soon as they are hired so that it becomes a habit. Tell them to look at each tool, each piece of raw material, each component or spare part and ask themselves: Is it in use? Is it really needed? If the answer is “no”, then take it away.

## AVOID SCATTER

TIP

But where do you put tools and materials that are not being used? The first rule is NOT to put them on the ground near the building. They take up space. And they also create an obstacle course, as workers try to walk around and over them, reducing efficiency. Or worse, things on the ground lead to injuries when workers trip over them. They are a hazard to young workers.

There is often not a lot of room at the construction site. So be innovative and “go up”. Designate one part of the site for storage. Build simple shelves, multi-level racks, or pallets in the area to house tools and fragile materials. To avoid low back pain, falls, or injuries from falling objects, provide solid ladders and design the racks so that young workers can use them with ease. Here are the guidelines:

- the lowest level rack for heavy material should not be lower than workers’ knees.
- heavy materials should not be higher than the workers’ shoulders.

**TIP MAKE LIFTING MORE EFFICIENT AND SAFER**

A heavy load suspended in the air is always dangerous, especially in a small, crowded construction site. Where possible, use ground-based lifting devices that raise objects only the minimum necessary to move them. Keep young workers away from areas where there are overhead cranes and hoists as they can result in serious accidents. Young workers should not be allowed to operate heavy lifting equipment.

Young workers can injure themselves through repeated lifting or by trying to lift heavy items all by themselves. They are still growing and bones or joints can be permanently injured by too much strain. The rule for young workers is:

- **divide heavy items into smaller loads, or**
- **have 2 or 3 young people lift them together.**

Although it depends somewhat on the size and strength of the worker, it is generally more efficient to lift more objects weighing less than 20 kg, than fewer objects weighing more.



# EQUIPMENT & TOOLS

- ✓ **Do mark which equipment is hazardous and ‘off limits’ for young workers**
- ✓ **Do give young workers hand tools that are sized to fit them**
- ✓ **Do train young workers to use machines and tools safely**

Even simple tools and equipment can cause work stoppages and severe injuries when misused or not maintained properly. If a construction company is to remain competitive, it cannot afford these delays which can seriously affect output and delivery schedules. But there are several simple measures that you can take to avoid slowdowns due to an accident.

## **THE RULE: THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT OF THE RIGHT SIZE.**

**TIP**

If the tools are designed for big adults (for example, a heavy weight sledgehammer or pick), young workers will be less productive and the risk of accidents will go up. Tools that are too big and heavy will be tiring and cause mistakes. Comfortable and well-designed handles can make a big difference but they cannot compensate for excessive weight.

There also needs to be the right equipment on site and enough items of equipment so that workers do not need to stand around waiting to use it. Too often accidents happen when workers do not have what they need -- wheelbarrows for hauling material for example – and resort to other methods which are more risky.

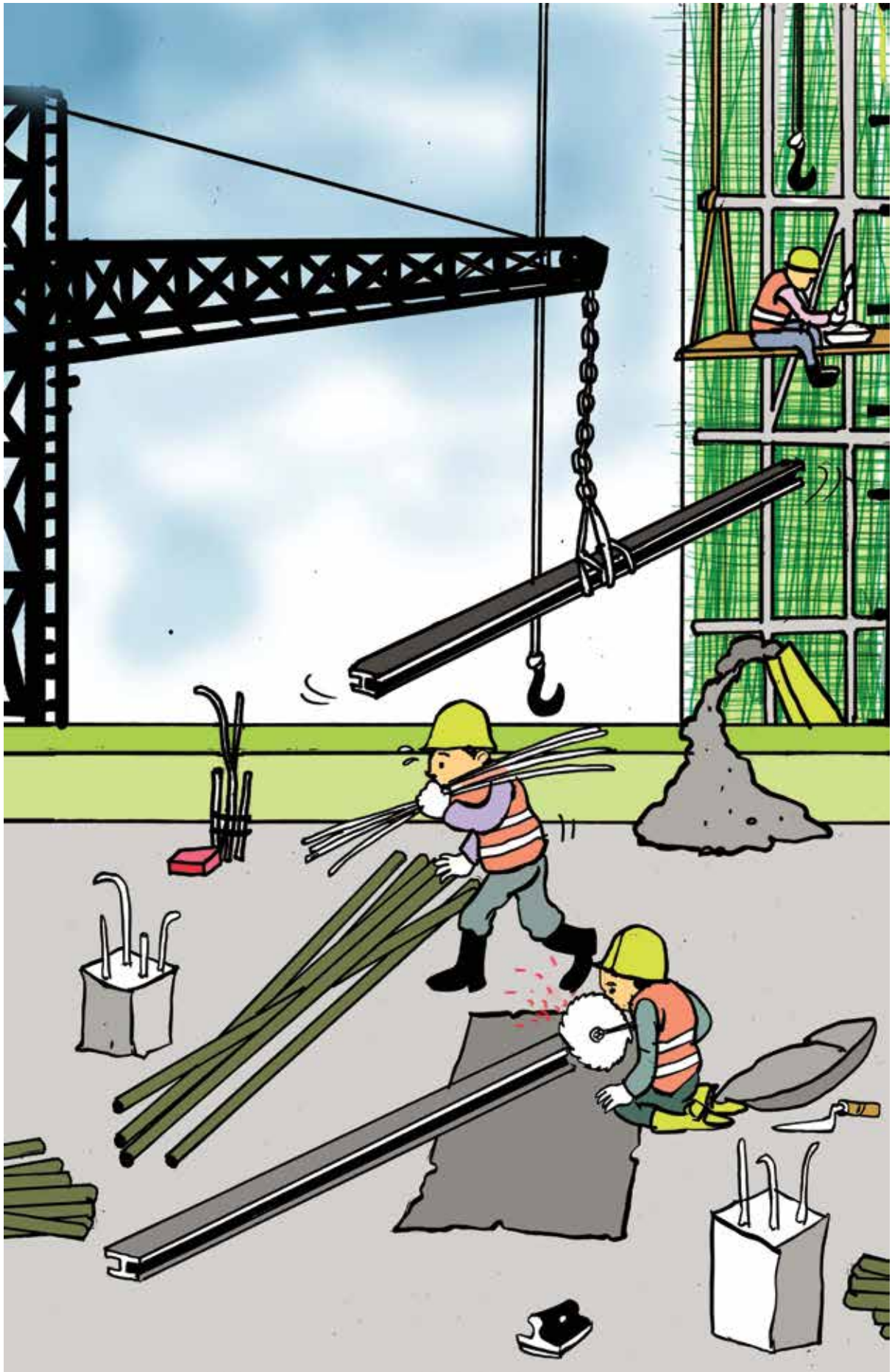
## **REGULARLY CHECK LADDERS, ROPES, SCAFFOLDING, ETC. FOR WEAR**

**TIP**

## **AND TO SEE THAT YOUR WORKERS ARE USING THEM RIGHT.**

The greatest hazards posed by this equipment result from misuse, lack of training, and improper maintenance. Keep ropes, hoses, and lines coiled and out of the way when not in use. Ensure that ladders are solid and have non-slip footings.

Workers under age 18 should not be allowed on high ladders, scaffolding, walls, or structures with unguarded openings. “High” depends on the ground underfoot, the quality and strength of the ladder or scaffolding, and other local conditions but countries often set 6 feet (2 meters) as the maximum height at which young workers can work.





## REGULARLY CHECK ALL OF THE TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

TIP

The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that any tools a young worker will need to use for the job s/he is employed to do are in good condition.

- Are cutting tools sharp? (dull tools lead to more cuts and more serious cuts because workers have to use extra force to cut with them)
- Are any power cords frayed or raw on the power tools? Electrical shock is a key construction hazard.
- Are there some machines or vehicles that are frequently breaking down causing delays or bottlenecks? Are there some that workers fear or hesitate to use?
- Have any machine guards been altered, removed, or broken? This includes welding shields and other protective equipment.

When you buy construction equipment – new or secondhand -- check that it has all of the safety guards in place. Used machinery may have had the guards dismantled. Workers will operate more quickly and efficiently if they are not afraid of being injured by a machine. Buying a more expensive but safer and better built machine will often save you money in the long-term.

## TRAIN YOUNG WORKERS ON THE PROPER CARE AND USE OF POWER TOOLS

TIP

Some basic rules are:

- Never carry a power tool by the cord; never disconnect the tool from the electrical outlet by pulling on its cord
- Keep power extension cords off the ground
- Don't plug too many cords into one power supply
- Keep cords and hoses away from heat, oil, and sharp edges
- Disconnect power tools when not using them, before servicing and cleaning them, and when changing accessories such as blades, bits, and cutters
- Do not wear loose clothing because it can be caught in moving parts
- Do not stand in water, on damp ground, or in the rain when working with electrical tools – keep hands and electric tools dry
- Do not let young workers work on electrical wires; they require protective gear

Young workers should not operate or work within 3 meters of heavy machinery or large vehicles. The risks of injury are too great. These include:

- rotating shafts, wheels, rollers, pulleys, and gears (e.g. large cement mixers) that can catch clothing, skin, or hair and literally pull the worker into the machine
- machines where one part rolls against another, creating a “nip point” in which hands or clothing can be caught
- power machines with a back and forth movement that may catch a worker unaware
- cutting and punching, shearing, and bending operations
- under cranes or lifts

# HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES

- ✓ **Do label containers of hazardous substances**
- ✓ **Don't allow young workers to mix, handle, or use hazardous chemicals**
- ✓ **Do train young workers on risks associated with cleaning**

A polluted working environment reduces efficiency and production. When there are dusts, fumes or smoke in the air, or when oil, paint, and other materials are being sprayed, there is a health hazard. Young workers should not mix, handle, or use hazardous chemicals and they should not be in enclosed areas where this is being done. They are more easily affected than adults because their brains and organ systems are still developing and they may not realize the risks to their health because the effects may not be immediate.

## TIP

### **LABEL ALL CONTAINERS OF HAZARDOUS CHEMICALS AND STORE THEM IN ONE PLACE**

Because chemicals are expensive, it makes business sense to reduce economic losses due to their inefficient storage, handling, use and/or disposal. Make sure that you have a chemical safety data sheet for each chemical that you use or produce, and that you and your workers, particularly young workers, understand the data sheets. These sheets provide information about the chemical, such as its proper use and precautions, such as causing fire or explosion. Can it be absorbed through the skin? Is it dangerous for young women who are or might become pregnant? They also explain whether protective equipment is required and what emergency measures to take in the event of a chemical spill or explosion. Remember, if the chemical safety data sheet says the material is hazardous, it is "off limits" for younger workers.

## TIP

### **REPLACE A DANGEROUS SUBSTANCE WITH ONE THAT IS SAFER**

Organic solvents are widely used in industry to dissolve grease, oil, paint, and glue or for cleaning machinery and metal surfaces. Some common names are paint thinner, white spirit, naphtha, xylene, toluene, trichloroethylene, and acetone.

Many organic solvents are highly flammable and can explode. They can damage the skin, and can be absorbed into the body through the skin or lungs causing serious health problems. High short-term exposure may cause headaches, blurred vision, or even death. Low long-term exposure may result in nerve damage or cancer. Do not let organic solvents touch the skin.

Organic solvents can sometimes be replaced with less dangerous substances. For example, oil and grease can usually be cleaned up with a 5-10% soap-based cleaning solution. More complete degreasing can be achieved by using an alkaline substance such as caustic soda (sodium hydroxide) or calcium hydroxide. A solution using one of these substances will normally degrease metal surfaces sufficiently to allow paint to be applied without problems. To avoid rust, cleaned products should be dried properly and each unit should be stored separately. Cleaning and degreasing with soap and alkalis is often less dangerous and less expensive than cleaning with organic solvents. However, goggles and gloves should be used with alkalis and young workers should not handle them.

## COVER AND LABEL

### TIP

Always put a lid on containers of hazardous chemicals. A lid saves you money by reducing evaporation, leaks, or spills. Lids also keep dangerous vapors from organic solvents, paint, or glue from escaping and contaminating the air. Also, make a policy that all containers with chemicals in them, no matter how small, should be labeled. It is dangerous and wasteful to have unlabelled containers on the site.

## IF YOU CAN SEE DUST IN THE AIR, IT IS ALREADY TOO MUCH

### TIP

However, some hazardous dusts and fumes can be “too high” even when you cannot see them. Sawing, mixing, vehicle exhaust, burning rubbish, and dry soil being kicked up by the work can all create dust. Dust with crystalline silica in it (from rock, brick, or concrete) is especially dangerous for young workers and can cause permanent damage to the lungs. Other sources of hazardous dust are:

- ore, coal, sand, concrete, ceramic pipe, brick, rock, and gravel (whenever you grind, cut, drill, chip or polish these, there is risk of silica dust).
- asbestos and metal dusts, such as lead, chromium, copper, cadmium, manganese, and mercury (exposure can come through smoke from furnaces or fumes from welding and soldering, from grinding metal, repairing radiators, and disturbing paint with metal-based pigments).

Many employers assign young workers to do the cleaning up, thinking this is a safe task that requires little experience or training. But sweeping up dry dust or blowing it off equipment with compressed air can be dangerous because small particles remain in the air for hours and can be inhaled deeply into the lungs. A better way to clean up is to moisten the dust first and then sweep.



**TIP** **PROVIDE A PLACE FOR WASHING AND CHANGING SO WORKERS  
DON'T TAKE DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES HOME**

There have been cases of young workers being poisoned because their fingers or food have become contaminated by toxic substances at the site. The best protection is washing their hands before eating, and keeping or eating their food in a clean place away from the construction site. It is up to the owner or site supervisor to make sure they have these facilities.

It is also a good idea for all workers, including young ones, to get in the habit of showering and changing clothes before going home so that family members are not exposed to any bits of toxic material on their hair or work clothes.

One of the most common and most serious “take-home” hazards is lead dust. It especially affects the unborn (when women are exposed to lead) and young children.

## PREPARE FOR EMERGENCIES

## TIP

When hazardous substances are used, there is always a risk that an accident will occur. A chemical might spill, or a worker might get splashed. Plan for such events even if they have never happened before. Place warning signs in the areas where hazardous substances are used. If chemicals are used, it is wise to have an eyewash station close by. If you cannot afford an eye wash fountain, you can provide plastic squeeze bottles filled with pure water for workers to wash their eyes with. Set up a program to routinely check that the eyewash station (or other type of system) is clean and works, otherwise it may not be ready when needed. Show young workers what to do if an emergency happens.



# LIGHT, NOISE, TEMPERATURE

- ✓ **Do not let youth work near welding operations**
- ✓ **Do not let youth work where there are high noise levels**
- ✓ **Do make sure young workers are not exposed to hot sun for long periods**

Young workers usually have excellent eyesight but it must be protected. Dust and smoke in the air can damage eyes, as well as flying particles from saws, stone-breaking, and similar operations.

## **TIP KEEP YOUTH COMPLETELY AWAY FROM WELDING**

Exposure to the blinding light of a welding torch is a particularly serious risk in construction. Sun glasses are not sufficient protection.

## **TIP NOISE LEVELS ARE TOO HIGH IF YOU CANNOT HEAR SOMEONE**

### **SPEAKING 2 METERS AWAY**

Machines and power tools can make a great deal of noise. Young workers' hearing can be permanently damaged if they are exposed to noise for too long, or if the level of noise is too loud; they are more vulnerable to hearing damage than adults. Loud or sudden noise is also hazardous because it startles or distracts workers, and prevents warning shouts from being heard.

### **To reduce noise levels, there are 3 possible approaches to take**

1. **Eliminate the source.** The best way to reduce noise is to buy new, quieter equipment. Although they may initially cost more, they are often of higher quality and last longer because they are built to tighter tolerances (e.g., gears fit together better). Shut down noisy equipment when not needed.
2. **Isolate it.** Enclose the machine or create a sound barrier between it and the workers. Compressors, pumps, or generators can sometimes be moved away from where workers routinely work. The level of noise drops quickly with distance from the source. Ear plugs are not a good or permanent solution because they make communication difficult — especially warnings — and because they are uncomfortable to wear for long periods workers tend to take them off.
3. **Maintenance.** Lubricate machines to prevent unnecessary wear and grinding noises. Replace chipped gear teeth, adjust vibrating or imbalanced parts, and inspect noise control attachments to ensure that they are functioning properly.

# WORKERS COMFORT FACILITIES

- ✓ **Do ensure clean drinking water is available**
- ✓ **Do insist that young workers take routine rest breaks**
- ✓ **Do provide clean toilets, with separate ones for women**

During each working day, young workers need to drink clean water (more than adults), eat meals and snacks, wash their hands, use a clean and private toilet, and rest and recover from fatigue. This can be difficult or easy, unpleasant or comfortable, a health risk or an aid to hygiene and nutrition. A small investment in such facilities usually pays for itself in many ways. On the other hand, worker dissatisfaction can be costly.

## PROVIDE CLEAN DRINKING WATER

**TIP**

Clean drinking water is essential for all types of work. Especially in a hot environment, each worker can easily lose several litres of water per work shift. If not provided with drinking facilities, workers become thirsty and gradually dehydrated. This greatly increases fatigue and lowers productivity.

The availability of water is particularly important for young workers because they need to drink more fluid than adults.

If you keep a supply of water near the workers, less time will be lost in going to get a drink and they will be more likely to drink enough. However, do not place drinking water in washrooms or toilets, near dangerous machines or other hazards or where it can be contaminated by dust, chemicals, or other substances.

Make sure that the drinking water is cool. If you cannot afford a water cooler, place the water in the coolest place in the construction site. Do not leave it in the sun or in a hot place.

## MAKE SURE THAT REST MEANS RECOVERY

**TIP**

Young workers usually start the day alert and productive, but their energy level decreases as the day goes on. Fatigue grows gradually and may not be apparent until the person is really tired. Especially younger workers, because they lack seniority and self-confidence, have a tendency to keep pushing themselves to the limit. It is important for you, the manager, to insist on them taking breaks. If the worker rests before showing signs of fatigue, recovery is much faster. Short breaks taken frequently are much better than infrequent but long breaks. For most types of work, workers will produce much more with breaks than they can by working continuously. At least one ten-minute break in the morning and one in the afternoon, in addition to a longer break for lunch is absolutely necessary. A five-minute break every hour is an excellent idea.

A good rest area also helps to reduce fatigue. Getting away from a noisy, polluted or isolated workstation helps young workers relax and recover from fatigue. A simple canopy outside the workplace may provide a shady rest area, especially if there are plants and breezes. Avoid bright sunlight: the eyes need to rest as well as the body. A table and chairs are needed and a place to lie down can also be a good idea. This type of rest area can also double as a safe place to eat.



**HELPFUL  
RESOURCES**

**KEEP THEM SAFE**



# WHO CAN HELP

## HAZARD CONTROL INFORMATION

This booklet covers some potential problem areas of construction sites, but not all. It does not go into detail on hazardous chemicals, particularly the very toxic ones, nor can it cover all the laws and regulations which govern exposure to hazardous agents. These more technical areas require the assistance of specialized professionals such as occupational hygienists to identify, evaluate, and devise control measures. If you have Internet access, go to [www.ilo.org/safework](http://www.ilo.org/safework) for help. Otherwise, the ministry of labour, ministry of health, medical school, or hospitals may be able to help.

Name of the Employers' Organisation in Myanmar,  
Its general phone number .....  
Contact person's name .....

Department of labour contact information  
Its general phone number .....  
Contact person's name .....

Labour Inspectorate contact information  
Its general phone number .....  
Contact person's name .....

Trade union contacts  
Its general phone number .....  
Contact person's name .....

Medical care contact information  
Its general phone number .....  
Contact person's name .....



**ACTION  
CHECKLIST**

**KEEP THEM SAFE**



# ACTION CHECKLIST

This chart is an easy way to check whether your construction site is safe for young workers. Asking your young workers help complete this checklist is an excellent way to get them to think about safety!

## Here is how to use it

1. Do a work site inspection at least every month.

---
2. Walk through the site and assess whether each item has already been addressed, is not needed, or needs attention. Put a checkmark in the “no” or “yes” columns accordingly.

---
3. After you have finished, look again at the items in the “no” column. Choose a few to be addressed immediately. Mark these items as a priority by putting a checkmark in the “!” column.

---
4. Be sure to put notes in the “comments” column because it is hard to remember details from one time to another. Especially make note of anything that should be followed up on in the next inspection.

---

Question	Notes for action		
<b>General rules for protection of young workers</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>no</b>	<b>!</b>
There are no workers under age 14 at or near the construction site, even helping out			
Supervisors and managers are familiar with the Myanmar labor laws and follow them			
“OK” & “Not OK” tasks have been determined for young workers; all workers obey this list			
Each new young worker is assigned to a supervisor who is responsible for safety training and oversight			
An occupational safety and health plan has been developed for this site			
<b>Rights and working conditions for young workers</b>			
All young workers, including temporary ones, have written contracts			
All young workers receive a medical check-up and medical fitness certificate before being hired			
We check how much schooling a young worker has completed before being hired			
Young workers are trained for each new assigned task; their skills are re-checked periodically			
Young workers are trained on what to do if they have an accident, illness or emergency			
An active Workers’ Committee represents and negotiates for young workers on labour issues			
A list of young workers’ rights is posted where it is visible to all			
A policy against harassment and violence has been made; it is posted where it is visible to all			
If a workplace accident occurs, management provides transport and payment for medical services			
Young workers receive at least minimum wage; the wages are paid to them and paid on time			
Young workers have full labour rights including holidays, benefits, and social protection coverage			
If young workers show signs of not having enough food, clothing or a place to stay, they are referred to a social service agency			
Young workers are not allowed to work at night or to go home in the dark			
Young workers are not allowed to work more than 40 hours per week or overtime			
Management keeps a daily log of work hours and medical fitness record for each young worker			
Young workers have the right to free labor recruitment			
We provide incentives to help young workers develop good work skills and good work habits			
There is a clear procedure for correction or firing of young workers			



Question	Notes for action		
<b>Specific rules for protection of young workers</b>	yes	no	!
All young workers are trained on safe lifting techniques and supervisors see that they use them			
No young workers are allowed to lift or carry heavy loads (e.g. more than 20% their body weight)			
No young worker is allowed to work in the hot sun for long periods of time (e.g. more than 2 hours)			
Young workers are not allowed to use power tools unless under close adult supervision			
Young workers may not work on unguarded roofs, high ladders, scaffolding, or walls			
Young workers do not drive vehicles or powered equipment on site or work near heavy equipment or vehicles			
There is no asbestos or cement dust at the work site or where young workers are working			
Adolescents do not work in enclosed spaces where chemicals are used or respirators are needed (e.g. painting, stripping)			
All containers containing chemicals are clearly labelled; the labels are visual and in local languages			
Young workers do not use, transport, store or otherwise handle toxic chemicals or materials			
Young workers are not allowed to weld or work near welding operations			
Noise levels are not so high where youth are working they need to shout to communicate			
Young workers wear shoes on site, gloves if needed, and do not wear loose clothing			
<b>Workers' comfort facilities</b>			
There is cool, clean drinking water nearby for young workers to drink whenever they want			
Toilets are regularly cleaned, close to the work area, and have soap and water for washing			
There are separate toilets for girls and women			
There is a clean and comfortable place for the workers to rest and eat			
The young workers have a place at the construction site to wash up before eating			
Young workers have a place to wash themselves and change clothes before going home			
<b>Premises</b>			
Trash is not burned on site			
Alcohol and drugs are not allowed on site			

**Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work  
Branch (FUNDAMENTALS)**

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