

Vulnerable Workers

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What is the definition of a vulnerable worker?

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) states that vulnerable workers - young, new, aging, plus migrant/immigrant workers - are disproportionately employed in physically demanding or hazardous jobs. This puts them at higher risk for workplace injuries and illnesses.

Vulnerable workers are those workers who have greater exposure than most to injury and illness due to their lack of experience, reluctance to ask questions, communication barriers and type of work.

Other factors may include:

- Recently moved to Manitoba from another province/country
- Just started their first job
- Just returned to work after a long absence
- Do not have appropriate documentation and/or who are refugees
- Do not have adequate English language skills

Young workers

Safe Work Manitoba defines a young worker as people between the ages of 15 to 24 years. These workers are more likely to have a serious incident at work than older adults, for a few different reasons:

- Lack of experience and often lack physical and psychological maturity. This may lead them to misunderstand the



severity of safety and health hazards (and their associated risks) in the workplace. As they are new to the work environment, they may not even be aware of the risks associated with the hazards.

- They may mistakenly assume that what others are doing is safe, or that their supervisors or more senior employees are operating in a safe manner. These assumptions can lead to lifelong habits of working in an unsafe manner.
- They may also be exposed to poor working conditions that lead to the development of occupational illnesses while still young or later in life.

Aging worker

At the other end of the spectrum, we have the aging worker. This worker has been with the company for a greater amount of time and perhaps has become complacent while performing their job.

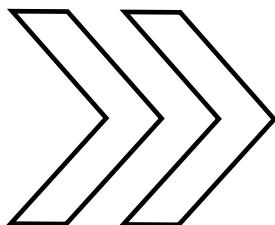
While older workers are generally less likely than younger workers to have occupational incidents, the incidents involving older workers are likely to result in more serious injuries, permanent disabilities, or death, than for younger workers.

- Older workers may experience more slips, trips and falls than younger workers, and recovery following an injury may take longer.
- For fear of losing their job, older workers may be hesitant to share age-related health concerns, such as reduced vision or hearing, with their employers, which can become a health and safety hazard.
- They may also be more challenged by the adoption of new technology or new procedures.

New Workers (new job, migrant/immigrant)

New workers are different from young workers in that they are not necessarily entering the workforce for the first time.

- They could be starting a job in a new province or country, so jurisdiction rules and procedures, even language may be different.
- May be returning to work after an absence such as maternity leave or an injury and is possible that conditions and procedures have changed.
- Or they could be working for the same company, but in a new job with different tasks or different location. As a result they may be facing new hazards for which they are not prepared or adequately trained.



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These workers should undergo the orientation program and have an opportunity to review and discuss their return to work, identify any new hazards related to the job, ask any questions and receive appropriate training.

Training Requirements for Different Groups

Training young workers:

As a new worker, you may have questions about your work. If you are unsure of anything, always ask your employer or supervisor to go over any procedures or practices until you feel comfortable proceeding. Seek feedback from your supervisor or instructor to make sure you are performing the tasks correctly. Make sure that you have been properly fitted with personal protective equipment (PPE) and are shown how to wear it, clean it, and store it properly.

- Ask experienced employees and/or your supervisor about workplace hazards,
- Know what to do in an emergency situation, such as a fire alarm or power failure,
- Ask for a copy of the health and safety rules, if you aren't given one,
- Follow all safety precautions,
- Report any incidents or unsafe conditions to your supervisor immediately.

Training aging workers:

Training requirements may be different for older workers. Since learning is based on previous experience, training may need to be more "practically" based. New skills need to be explained in a way that fits into what they already know.

Training may take longer than with younger workers. There may also be a need for more assistance or practice. However, several studies show that there may not be a difference in how well someone works once the learning curve has been reached. (Source: CCOHS)

Training new workers or migrant/immigrant:

Other effective training methods for new workers can include:

- Hands-on or practical training (before starting the actual work),
- Mentoring by experienced workers,
- Apprentice programs,
- Written safety procedures which are clear and concise,
- Practice time and opportunity to ask questions and obtain feedback,
- Programs written in an active voice with clear instructions,
- Grouping equipment or tasks with similar functions.

Employer responsibilities

- Employers and supervisors are legally responsible for providing safety training and orientation to all workers starting a new job or taking on new tasks:
- Assign suitable work. Avoid assigning jobs to inexperienced workers that require long training times, a great deal of responsibility, critical or risky tasks, or working alone;

- Instruct workers not to perform any task until they have been properly trained;
- Provide detailed training on equipment, safety features, and control systems;
- Communicate with the worker about the job tasks clearly and frequently, repeating and confirming this training over the first few weeks of work;
- Provide and instruct on the proper and safe usage of PPE;
- Provide and maintain equipment, tools, & PPE in working order.

Worker Responsibilities

Workers need to comply with all safety policies and procedures in the workplace and take all necessary training to perform their job safely and free of hazards.

Worker Rights

All workers need to know their rights:

- The right to know what hazards are present on the job and how to protect themselves,
- The right to participate in keeping their workplace healthy and safe and a right to report unsafe conditions and practices,
- The right to refuse dangerous or unsafe work, making sure to follow specific procedures when doing so.

Do you need more information? RPM can help!

Our Advisory and Training team can help with tips and templates to design a safety and health program. We can also facilitate training to identify hazards and incorporate controls to prevent injuries.

Please note RPM courses are offered to RPM registered companies only. Your company must be registered with RPM and be in the process of working towards certification or must have achieved the SAFE Work Manitoba Trucking Certificate of Recognition. Not yet registered in the RPM program? Today is a great day to get started!

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