

Labor Department promotes teen work safety

Bobby Lee, now 17, recalled his horrific workplace accident, which happened in July 1995, shortly after he began his job at a beef-processing plant in Cincinnati.

"I slipped on the floor and fell into the meat grinder. It cut off my arm," he said.

This summer, more than 3 million young people under 18 are expected to work in summer jobs, over a million more than during the school year, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

The government says 210,000 teenagers get hurt on the job each year, a third of them winding up in hospital emergency rooms. Every week, at least one teen-ager on average dies as a result of a work-related injury.

To bring down these numbers, a diverse coalition has launched a nationwide educa-

tion drive to publicize the hazards and promote ways to keep teens safe on the job. The campaign, "Work Safe This Summer," brings together parents, employers, pediatricians and the young workers themselves, including Bobby Lee, who is serving as an unpaid spokesman.

While some employers are instinctively wary of federal mandates, others have hopped on board.

Kmart Corporation will distribute 37 million shopping bags featuring the Work Safe This Summer logo and the slogan "Learn a Lesson for a Lifetime" along with information on how to learn more about teen work safety, said corporate affairs vice president Shawn Kahle.

Each of Kmart's 2,100 stores nationwide will also post "The Teen Workers' Bill of

Rights," which includes this item: "I have the right to required safety clothing, equipment and training." The declaration, drafted by the Labor Department, also states that teen-agers under 18 are by law prohibited from certain tasks, such as using power tools and slicing machines.

Some companies have independently tried innovative ways of preventing injuries and fatalities among their teen-age workers.

In Virginia, a chain of 31 pizza restaurants is posting signs offering a \$100 reward to workers under 18 who report they have been asked to perform hazardous jobs, such as operating a machine that flattens dough. Several young employees asked by supervisors to do risky work have taken the reward, said Vicky Johoske, a spokeswoman for Blue Ridge-based Aces Inc., a franchisee of

Little Caesar's. The supervisors were fired, she said.

Wawa convenience stores in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland and Delaware have issued different-colored smocks to workers under 18, so that supervisors will know who isn't allowed to operate the electric meat slicer, said Lori Bruce, spokeswoman for the 497-stores chain based in Wawa, PA.

In Texas, Whataburger restaurants developed a computer tracking system to ensure that their 8,000 young workers in nine states aren't scheduled for too many hours or too late in the evening.

Injuries and some fatalities have resulted from late-night robberies of retail stores, including fast-food outlets, according to government reports.


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

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