

Serve your community SAFELY

A guide for Ontario secondary school students completing their 40 hours of community involvement

Teens and young adults under the age of 24 are at much higher risk of injury while on the job than any other age group. That job doesn't have to involve a pay check – even as a volunteer, you are likely to be exposed to the same types of hazards that have resulted in serious injuries to young workers in Ontario.

...DON'T give until it hurts!

We all want to do our best. We want to show those we are working with that we can handle the tasks they give us and that we're smart (and we are!), and we want to make everyone satisfied with our performance – the people we're helping and the people who assign us the work.

Injuries can be relatively minor cuts, bruises and strains but far too often result in broken bones, dislocations, burns, concussions or the amputation of a finger, hand, toe or arm. There are even small numbers of teens who die from the injuries they suffer in Ontario workplaces.

TRIVIAL !!! – NOT. REPORT ALL INJURIES even if...

- you are volunteering with your parent or family friend
- you think that reporting will make them think less of your capabilities
- you think it's "nothing"
- you're concerned about what others will think.

REALITY CHECK – you are not invincible!

EVERYONE in their teens thinks that nothing is going to happen to them. It's a great feeling to think you can conquer any challenge, tackle any task, free of fear and ready to rumble. But pinch your skin, get a paper cut, touch a hot burner on the stove, or fall down the stairs and guess what – it hurts!

Your body is pretty fantastic in that it grows and small cuts and bruises heal, but it's not perfect. Break a leg and you may suffer for years to come; break your neck or spine and you may be in a wheelchair for life; suffer a head injury and your brain may never work the same again. It happens and it has happened to other teens just like you.

Forget about it!

Besides the general rules of community involvement, to protect your safety, the Ministry of Education prohibits:

- operation of vehicles, use of power tools (i.e. snow blower, power mower, mixers and dishwashers in commercial kitchens, hedge trimmers);
- use of scaffolding
- administration of any form of medication or performing any medical procedure
- handling “Designated Substances”, which are regulated under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA). The most common ones you might come across include mercury, asbestos, and lead.

Age matters

PROVINCIAL legislation – in the form of regulations made under the OHSA – also prohibits your participation as a volunteer:

- on a construction site or logging operation unless you’re 16
- in a factory setting unless you’re 15
- in an industrial workplace unless you’re 14.

DO THE MATH!

Few years of WORK EXPERIENCE + Lack of TRAINING + Poor SUPERVISION = High risk of INJURY

WHO could have known? The answer is YOU!

HOW CAN I KNOW HOW TO DO THE JOB IF I’VE NEVER DONE IT BEFORE?

YOU CAN’T! and this is not the time for trial and error or learning as you go – ask for training and a demonstration. Don’t perform the task until both you and your supervisor are sure you can do it – safely.

YOU are bright, willing to work, anxious to help and capable, BUT sometimes it’s difficult to admit that you don’t know how do things. Could you or your friend bake a cake from scratch *without a recipe* (how many could with one!)? Could you replace the motherboard in your computer if you didn’t have some background knowledge or a manual? Of course *NOT*, and *no one* would expect you to be able to.

HOW IN THE WORLD COULD I KNOW ABOUT THE HAZARDS IN THE TASKS THEY GIVE ME?

You’re not a mind reader. The job is new, the rules are new, the stuff you’re exposed to is new, but you have to know – every job has hazards involved in it. Most hazards can be easily controlled, but you have to know it’s DANGEROUS in the first place.

Here are a few hints:



- **STEER** away from operating machinery wherever possible – it's not only prohibited for your community involvement program – it's **VERY** dangerous. Operating industrial equipment, and I don't mean just factory equipment, but also forklifts, motorized carts, mixers in a kitchen, lawnmowers or trimmers requires **STRICT** training. **ANY** motorized equipment **MUST** be treated with respect. These **THINGS** don't have a brain or a heart – their job is to run and run they will. They can tangle your hair around their gears, catch your clothing and cause severe damage to your arms or legs, pinch your fingers, grab your hands or amputate your fingers. Worse things can happen, but I think you get my drift.
- **KEEP AWAY** from chemicals. **CHEMICALS** used in workplaces often contain ingredients not found in house-hold products and can cause serious problems for people who work with them without following strict procedures. You've heard about **WHMIS** – well this is where **WHMIS** is in action in the workplace. There are strict requirements for labelling, worker training and providing safety information. If you can, **AVOID** working with chemicals.
- **BACK** off from **BIOLOGICAL** exposure. You may be exposed to human waste as well as blood and spit if you work around people or in a laboratory. Animals also harbour bacteria (germs!) that can cause illness in humans. People, animals and things that pose a biological hazard have to be handled, but again, you need to know how to do it properly. Rubber gloves and heavy-duty hand washing are work procedures people exposed to these hazards are taught and learn to do – every day.
- **FALLING** at work. Slips on floors, stairs and other surfaces seem like something that “just happens” to everyone. Slips and falls from heights – even falling just a few feet – have resulted in some very serious injuries. All you have to do is hit your head, break your arm or leg, or worse, to know that slips and falls are not fun. In fact, slips and falls are one of the top reasons people are admitted to emergency rooms and one of the most common ways people at work suffer injuries. Watch out for wet, icy, or uneven floors. Only climb to reach something over your head if you have a proper ladder – one that's in good shape. Shelves, stools, rolling carts, boxes, etc. may seem like they're “good enough” to climb or stand on – but they really aren't. You deserve the **RIGHT** equipment.
- **ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL** – Just because someone else can lift those boxes or that person, doesn't mean you can. In a volunteer situation, where sometimes there are a lot of different jobs to be done (like working on a food drive) volunteer to do a job that you think you can handle – **NOT** everyone is

physically capable of carrying heavy boxes or helping seniors in and out of chairs.

DANGER lurks in things unknown

CANDYSTRIPER:

Examples of hazards to consider: exposure to biological hazards, radiation and slippery floors.

LAWN CUTTING:

Involves use of powered equipment (unless you use a “push mower”), and is therefore prohibited for secondary school community involvement work.

RESTOCKING LIBRARY SHELVES:

When you have to reach the top shelves, having a proper stool or ladder is critical. Use rolling carts to move books from one place to another – avoid lifting and carrying heavy items.

YOU need a game plan... (or rules to LIVE by)

- 1. GET training** – How do I do it? Can you show me? What things should I look out for? Learn how to do the job safely. Know the policies, procedures and rules and follow them. Know what to do when there’s an emergency.
- 2. BE supervised** – Will you be here to watch to see that I do the task correctly? If you’re not near to where I’m working and I have a question, who should I ask?
- 3. WEAR the gear** – hair nets, gloves, aprons, safety glasses, ear plugs, whatever. If they’re required find out how to use them properly and wear them.
- 4. THINK the job through and identify risks BEFORE you start it.** Identify unsafe practices and situations and report them.
- 5. ASK ASK ASK ASK ASK ASK** – Remember, there are no stupid questions, just stupid excuses when you do something without being told to do it and without instructions. Communicate!
- 6. DON’T do ANYTHING** that you haven’t been instructed to do safely and **NEVER** do anything you’ve been told not to do – for anyone. Your supervisor rules. If other people working with you ask you to do something you have been told not to do or have not received training in, check with your supervisor before you do it.
- 7. FOLLOW rules** – Every game plan and every job has to include rules to ensure everyone plays fairly and acts as part of a team to move the ball together.

8. **TELL** your supervisor if you see anything hazardous that may hurt you or someone else. At any time along the way, even if you see someone else doing something that you know could injure them, report it. WHO is doing it is not as important as WHAT is being done. This isn't RATTING, it's a mature move to prevent unnecessary injuries.
9. **IF you get hurt** – no matter how minor it may seem to you – REPORT it to your supervisor and let your family know. Remember that you are not being asked to give until it hurts.
10. **TALK** to your family and let them know the types of tasks you'll be doing and the training you've received, and let them know of any concerns you have or things you see that you don't think are right. **Sometimes** your parents DO know something you don't know!
11. **BE honest** – If you think the task is beyond your personal capabilities let the employer know right away – don't take on anything that you can't handle.
12. **DON'T ever ASSUME** you can do something you haven't done before without some guidance, instructions or supervision and never do anything MORE than what you were actually told to do without checking with the supervisor FIRST.

YOU ARE AMBITIOUS, but you're also in UNKNOWN territory. Don't start a task you don't understand (TRIAL and ERROR can be TRIAL and TERROR) and don't decide to do extra jobs you haven't been assigned to or trained for – there may be a very good reason why you weren't!

IMPRESS them with your finesse!

Too often we think we impress with speed, agility, digging in, putting our heads down and figuring it out ourselves. Well it's a new day! YOU know that you need instructions and you know you need to be supervised to ensure you do the job right and safely. You need to have any questions about hazards answered – you NEED to know.

Work on asking SMART questions – and all questions are smart. Only excuses are dumb – “If I had only known that before I started. I didn't know! No one told me.”

Sometimes enough is enough!

Let's face it, you're busy. With school, homework, family responsibilities, a job, a boyfriend or girlfriend, a social life, Facebook and texting friends, you get tired. Being tired and less attentive increases your risk of injury. A balance needs to be struck to

ensure your well-being comes first. Select volunteer times that don't conflict with other responsibilities and times you are most likely to be alert.

Your health and safety is more important than any job – pay check or not.

HEADS UP! Keep your eyes open and speak up.

YOU are important! **NO JOB** is worth your arm, leg or your life.

YOU are learning! **YOU** can't possibly know how to do things you haven't done before – **ALL QUESTIONS ARE SMART!**

You need to protect yourself!

For more information about workplace health and safety:

Ministry of Labour

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

Canada's National Workplace Health and Safety Website

WSIB Prevention Hotline: 1-800-663-6639