

## **Studies: Teens Unaware of Workplace Hazards**

Arkansas Workers' Compensation Commission/  
Health & Safety Division

[www.awcc.state.ar.us](http://www.awcc.state.ar.us) 1-800-622-4472 fax: 501-683-3169  
[Health&Safety@awcc.state.ar.us](mailto:Health&Safety@awcc.state.ar.us)



Wearing a hot pink T-Shirt with “The Windmill Grill” emblazoned in black across her back, Amanda Ullmer grabbed a can of whipped cream and added the final touches to an order.

Ullmer, with her dark locks pulled back into a tight knot on her head and a tiny apron stuffed with a ticket book, pen and straws, makes an ideal picture of a waitress.

“I love my job,” Ullmer said. “I enjoy working with people.”

Ullmer, 19, is like most teens who take a summer job. They usually work part-time for minimum wage. It’s what they might not know that might hurt them.

Studies show that most teens are often unaware of their rights as workers, and because they don’t have the experience of older workers, they don’t easily recognize workplace dangers. A combination of youthful energy and a reluctance to ask questions also increases the chances of an injury at the workplace.

Janelle Chaplin, 17, is a co-worker of Ullmer’s at The Windmill Grill. Chaplin has been working at the restaurant since she was 16 and says being a cashier and hostess keeps her busy. Chaplin wants to open her own business after attending college. She says it will be a place where art, music and writing are masterfully blended to allow people a chance to express themselves in a positive way. But when asked whether she knew what rights she had as an employee, Chaplin raised an eyebrow and hesitantly said, “No.” She also said she received safety training but wasn’t sure it was that helpful.

“They told me not to swallow the stuff we put in the bottles that we clean the tables with,” she said. Chaplin also said that while her employers are considerate and helpful, she doesn’t feel comfortable asking them questions. Chaplin said she has hurt herself several times, but it’s not a big deal, and she hasn’t reported it to her employer.

Each year, thousands of young workers are injured or killed on the job. Although there isn’t a single data source that provides a comprehensive picture of teen injuries, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) estimates more than 200,000 teens, ages 14 to 17, are hurt at work every year. That is a higher rate than their adult co-workers, even though youths are restricted from the most hazardous of jobs which include manufacturing and construction.

According to NIOSH, an average of 67 workers under age 18 died from work-related injuries each year from 1992 through 2000. In 1998, an estimated 77,000 required

treatment in hospital emergency rooms.

The Institute of Medicine lists the most common injuries suffered by working teens as cuts, bruises, sprains and strains, burns, and fractures or dislocations. It also notes the majority of jobs teens work are based in retail shops, restaurants, and grocery stores.

Tom Trine, owner of The Windmill Grill, said he employs 23 teenagers, about half his work force. Trine is always looking out for his young workers and is well-versed in child labor laws and occupational safety and health regulations. "I probably get more grief because I limit the amount of work I give them than how hard the work is," he said.

Trine not only provides mandated training, he also talks to each employee about hazards in food service and requires his staff to wear special shoes that are water- and grease-resistant.

(Studies article by Tracie Moyer of the Kokomo Tribune.)