

RISK MANAGEMENT OF YOUNG, NEW AND INEXPERIENCED WORKERS

Young, new and inexperienced workers with their new roles and responsibilities are at a disadvantage when it comes to worksite hazards. Being unconscious of the hazards or lacking the competency to manage the risks from their associated duties and surrounding work environment increases their potential and severity of incidents and injuries.

“Young workers are at a much higher risk of injury than workers of any other age group. More than half of the serious injuries and fatalities involving workers aged 15 to 24 occur during the first six months on the job. And almost 20 per cent occur during the first month on the job” (Worksafe BC, *New and Young Worker Orientation and Training Requirements FAQ*).

Identifying the increased risk that young, new and inexperienced workers are exposed to is a fundamental element of hazard assessment. As such, it needs to be considered when creating a safety management system for the organization. The workers’ potential for injury is increased as they are new to their assigned tasks and especially unaware of the hazards. This situation of unconscious incompetence can be managed with two elements of the safety management system.

Effective orientation of a worker to the company, work site, work site hazards, and the hazards of their required tasks raises workers’ awareness of the risks. This enables them to make conscious decisions to prevent incidents. Further education and on-the-job training prepares workers to hone their understanding of the hazards associated with their tasks and their working environment. With orientation and training programs, a worker can move from an unconscious incompetent state to a worker that is consciously competent.

This transition, however, requires leadership and identification of the young, new or inexperienced worker.

GREEN HAND

Young, new and inexperienced workers may be referred to as “green workers”, but are more commonly referred to as “green hands” in the oil and gas industry.

GREEN HAND PROGRAM – A PREFERRED PRACTICE

An effective program for managing green hands within an organization requires both the development of the worker’s skills and the ability to manage workplace and task hazards. Again, orientation and training programs for the development progression need to be included in a safety management system. However, during the worker’s development progression, there is an opportunity to supervisors and co-workers to mentor and coach green hands in their daily tasks.

In line with the principles of behaviour-based safety, developing green workers through supervision, mentoring and coaching is easier when a worker is identifiable as “green”.

One of the most common ways to readily identify a green worker is to have the worker wear a green hard hat or a green hand sticker on their hard hat.

Visible identification of a green hand worker means that worker can have the benefit of increased guidance from experienced supervisors and co-workers. Identifying green hands should prevent co-workers from making potentially dangerous assumptions about the green workers' experience or skills.

For example, green hands should not be expected to:

- Do their tasks as efficiently as an experienced worker or know the site-specific practices and procedures
- Be familiar with site "permit to work" or similar company specific controls for keeping the workplace safe
- Be familiar with operations, especially in an emergency
- Know tasks hazards and activity related hazards or how to manage them.

As a program, other requirements for the management of green hands may include the following provisions:

- Ensuring green workers are aware of their legislated occupational health and safety rights and obligations
- Ensuring reporting procedures to direct supervisors are understood
- Tracking of green hands to know where they are working and the tasks being conducted
- Green worker supervision until deemed competent to work with direct supervision
- A buddy system for emergency situations
- Encouraging green hands to ask questions and get feedback to gauge their understanding (green hands are often unsure of what to do but are reluctant to ask questions).

With any effective safety program, success of a green hand program will depend on positive management involvement and frontline supervisor support. Their leadership and commitment to develop green workers safely can ensure that green workers are singled out for help, not for initiations or practical jokes.

To be a consistent preferred practice for use in multiple employer workplaces, the identification of green hands on a job site needs to be done in a way that everyone understands the method used and their mentoring opportunities.

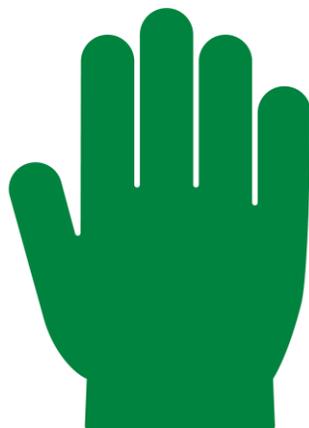
After demonstrating competency, conscious decision-making and commitment, a green hand can remove the green hand sticker or change to a different colour hard hat. The demonstration of skills, understanding and abilities is managed by the safety management systems element on training and competency assessment. Some organizations place a time duration for wearing a green identifier whereas others use testing and skill sign off as the trigger.

Creating a green hand program can bridge the elements of a safety management system together to integrate the tools used to decrease the risk of incidents and injuries with young, new and inexperienced workers.

CREATE YOUR OWN GREEN HAND PROGRAM

The information in this document can help you create your own green hand program. Companies will need to evaluate their needs and the needs of other possible partners during their program development. Occupational health and safety regulations specific to the jurisdiction for the management of young, new and inexperienced workers will also have to be consulted.

To help make this green hand initiative consistent throughout the oil and gas industry, the specifications for the “Green Hand” sticker are a size of 5cm by 5cm and ink matched to the colour Pantone© Green # 348. The template for a green hand sticker is:



JOIN A PROVEN INITIATIVE

The oil and gas industry, through Energy Safety Canada, is encouraging companies like yours to develop “Green Hand” programs, as similar programs have had positive effects in other industries and countries. Help protect your green workers. Add this proven safety tool to your toolbox for preventing workplace incidents.