

Johnston Packers



Priming individuals for young worker safety

In a busy meat processing plant like Johnston Packers, safety comes first. Working with bulky slabs of meat, sharp saws, and heavy machinery can be overwhelming to young workers. Johnston Packers' solution is progressive training mixed with a "safety first" message.

For Bob Manning, Johnston Packers' Health and Safety Coordinator, young worker safety is not only important to the company, but also to families.

"I never want to call the parents and explain to them their son or daughter has been hurt," says Manning. "Our goal is to eliminate young worker injuries due to a lack of knowledge or training."

The first part of the Chilliwack-based company's program is a safety orientation. Young workers learn about all the plant-wide policies and procedures. The goal is to teach young workers to recognize and eliminate general hazards in a meat processing plant.

They are also shown a variety of videos including WorkSafeBC's "Lost Youth": a graphic presentation of real young workers who have suffered serious workplace injuries. They also receive a health and safety booklet to read and review.

Next, young workers receive a comprehensive tour of the plant and learn how the production floor operates. Not only do young workers familiarize themselves with their workplace but they can also see all their learning in action.

Young workers then begin participating on the production floor. To help them safely integrate, an assigned mentor teaches them the ropes of their specific job. The mentor also serves as a go-to guide and resource for the young worker.

According to Manning, young workers are constantly re-assured throughout the entire process: "Do not be afraid to ask questions. Do not do anything that feels unsafe."

Two weeks after they start working on the production floor, Manning gives a pop quiz based on the booklet that was given out at the beginning of orientation. Manning then assesses the results of each young worker, and then follows-up with a customized, second orientation to re-visit certain safety topics.

Johnston Packers understands that young workers need not only training, but also reinforcement to stay safe on the job. A good health and safety program means investing in quality training for each individual.

"These young workers are someone's son or daughter," says Manning. "When it comes to their safety, treat them as if they were your own."