

Hiring Teens This Summer? Make Sure You Play by the Rules



If you're like many foodservice operators — particularly those in the quick-service or recreation segments — it's likely that your summer crew will include teenage workers picking up their first summer jobs. Without a doubt, teen workers are important to the restaurant industry, and increasingly so. The National Restaurant Association reports that the number of 16- to 24-year-olds in the labor force increased 4% from 1992 to 2002 and is expected to grow 9% between 2002 and 2012.

But hiring teens, particularly younger adolescents, carries with it some special challenges for employers. Sure, there can be the management frustrations of dealing with what many employers say is a Gen Y workforce that lacks a strong work ethic and requires new and different approaches to training. But there are more serious implications, as well, and top among them is teen worker safety.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA), nearly 230,000 of the 3 million teens who take summer jobs are injured at work each year -- 77,000 seriously enough to require emergency room visits. The vast majority of the total injuries, according to OSHA, occur in eating and drinking establishments.

As an employer, it's your responsibility to know and comply with both state and federal codes when hiring teens and to follow workplace limitations designed to protect them from injury. OSHA's website (www.osha.gov/SLTC/restaurant/index.html) is a great resource that can help you get up-to-speed quickly on employment practices that work — and don't work — for teens.

Here are a few of the important teen-related don'ts on OSHA's list:

- Don't allow teens under the age of 18 to operate, adjust or repair any power-driven meat processing equipment. This includes slicers, grinders, patty-forming machines and food processors when used to process meats. Minors can, however, clean the disassembled parts of such machines.
- Same goes for power-driven dough mixers and other bakery equipment. This includes horizontal and vertical dough mixers (including countertop models), batter mixers, bread dough dividing, rounding or molding machines, dough sheeters, cookie and cracker machines and cake-cutting bandsaws.
- Minors under 18 generally cannot drive any type of motor vehicle for work on public roads or highways. There is a limited exception to this provision that lets 17-year-olds drive for short periods of time, assuming they have a valid license,

the driving is done during daylight hours, it doesn't involve time-sensitive deliveries (i.e., pizza or other hot foods delivered to homes or businesses), and it's not an integral part of the job.

- Fourteen- and 15-year-olds can perform cooking tasks only on equipment that has no open flames and can use only deep fryers equipped with devices that automatically rise and lower the baskets.
- Minors under 16 years old can't perform any baking duties, including weighing, mixing and assembling ingredients and operating pizza or convection ovens.
- Minors 14 and 15 years old can't work in freezers or meat coolers. This includes duties such as taking inventory or cleaning, which would require them to remain in coolers or freezers for prolonged periods.
- Minors 14 and 15 years old can't work past 9 p.m. between June 1 and Labor Day. During the school year, employment curfew for these workers is 7 p.m.

For more information and a helpful Restaurant Employer Self-Assessment checklist, visit www.youthrules.dol.gov/selfassess_restaurant.htm. Teens can be energetic and enthusiastic workers, and lifesavers for employers during the busy summer season. Just make sure that you're prepared to put them to work in a way that protects both your own liability and their safety.