



‘Unsafe work – What would you do?’ Using WorkSafe Victoria’s recent ad campaign as a teaching tool

These notes accompany a DVD prepared by WorkSafe about young people in the workforce. The DVD can be obtained from Annie Hunter Block at WorkSafe’s Workplace Support & Education Division (annie_hunter_block@worksafe.vic.gov.au).

A recent WorkSafe Victoria advertising campaign presents scenarios in a number of workplace settings including construction, health care, manufacturing, office, warehousing and agriculture. In each one, the boss or supervisor tells a young worker to carry out a dangerous task that will result in death or serious injury – for example, “What I’ll get you to do is jump on the broken forklift and drive it into the shelves. They’ll collapse and break your neck – you OK with that?”

The young workers exhibit a range of reactions to the supervisor’s request. They are shocked, unable to believe what they’re hearing, bewildered, uncertain, afraid – and most significantly, they are not sure how to respond.

These ads are both funny and disturbing. They’re ‘over the top’, but they speak volumes about the situation that young workers may find themselves in workplaces.

WorkSafe has produced these ads in DVD format as a resource for teachers and students. The scenarios can be used to stimulate classroom discussions, role plays and student research about the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees in the workplace.

The resource may be particularly helpful when preparing students for work experience or structured workplace learning placements. They may also be a useful resource for VCAL Work Related Skills.

Classroom discussions

After showing the ads, ask students questions such as:

- In each scenario, what reason does the supervisor give for asking the young worker to do such a ‘dangerous’ job?
- What do you think the young workers are thinking as they listen to their supervisor’s request?
- If the young worker does as s/he’s told and is injured, who is responsible? Why?
- How should the young worker respond to the supervisor’s request? (This could be done as a role play, with one student playing the boss and another playing the young worker).

For example –

- tell the supervisor that you believe the task to be unsafe and ask for other work until the situation can be made safe;
 - speak to a health and safety representative (HSR) or union representative;
 - ring WorkSafe on 1800 136 089 (toll free and calls can be made anonymously); and/or
 - ring a parent, guardian or other trusted person.
- Would you feel OK about speaking up like this? What might stop you?
 - Have you ever been in a situation like this? What did you do?

Student research

- Why do we have health and safety laws in Victoria?
- What responsibilities do employers have in terms of health and safety at the workplace?
- What responsibilities do employees have in terms of health and safety at work?
- What are health and safety representatives (HSRs)? What role do they play in workplaces? What legal powers do they have?
- Why are employers required to consult with employees and HSRs about health and safety in the workplace?
- What action can an HSR take if there is an 'immediate risk' to the health and safety of workers in his or her designated work group?
- If you don't have an HSR in your workplace, what action can you take if there is an 'immediate risk' to your health and safety at work?
- What do WorkSafe inspectors do when they visit workplaces?
- What do you need to do if you are injured at work?

Here are some useful resources to help you and your students find answers to these questions:

- WorkSafe Victoria's *Summary of the Occupational Health and Safety Act*, (2nd Edition, June 2005) at <http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au>. Go to 'Forms and Publications' page and enter search terms 'Summary Act 2004'.
- WorkSafe Victoria has several publications dealing with workers' rights and responsibilities under OHS law. Go to: <http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au> and click on 'Laws and Regulations', then 'Worker Rights and Responsibilities'.

Check out the six-page introductory guide entitled *Information for employees on health and safety*.

Employee Representation (1st edition, September 2006) is a more detailed publication that may be difficult for students, but it's worth looking at pages 52-53, which explain:

- the term 'immediate risk to health and safety';
 - the powers of HSRs in these circumstances; and
 - what an employee may do if faced with an immediate risk, if he or she is not represented by an HSR.
- The Victorian Trades Hall Council has a special website for HSRs – *OHS Reps @ Work*. Check out the 'Law and Rights' pages at: <http://www.ohsrep.org.au/>
 - The Australian Council of Trade Unions' has a dedicated website for schools, 'ACTU WorkSite for Schools' located at: <http://www.worksite.actu.asn.au>. Have a look at Fact Sheet No 35: 'Occupational Health and Safety: It's not just about being clean'.

Role plays

Encourage students develop their own 'unsafe work' scenarios, drawing on their own experiences in casual work, and what they've learned about their legal rights.

Ask them to role play these scenarios – using all the options that might be available to the 'young worker' character in responding to his or her supervisor.

Posters

Students may like to create posters around one or more of the following issues:

- The OHS rights of young workers (especially casual workers)
- The role of HSRs
- Who to speak to if you feel unsafe at work
- Ways to respond to an employer request to perform unsafe work
- The role of WorkSafe Victoria
- Where to find information about OHS
- Typical hazards in your industry.

Feedback

Did you find this resource helpful? Please email your feedback to Annie Hunter Block at WorkSafe's Workplace Support & Education Division (annie_hunter_block@worksafe.vic.gov.au).