



# YOUNG PERSONS AND MATERIAL HANDLING EQUIPMENT

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# Introduction

One of the frequently asked questions to the British Frozen Food Federation is around the minimum age for persons using materials handling equipment, including electric pallet trucks and lift-trucks. Here we discuss how to manage the issues around young workers.

## HSE'S PERSPECTIVE

The HSE state that there is no minimum age specifically for the use of mobile plant, although lift truck operators should be over the minimum school leaving age (MSLA). One exception is in ports where they must be at least 18 years old.

## AT GREATER RISK

Rates for injuries sustained at work are among their highest in less experienced, young people embarking on their working careers. This is because they are likely to:

- not be fully developed
- physically or mentally
- be less competent as they have had less training and lack experience
- encounter unfamiliar risks both from the work activities they carry out and from their surroundings
- have an increased willingness to take risks and shortcuts, often to impress management and colleagues
- have a less developed decision-making ability than older workers
- lack the confidence to speak up about a workplace hazard.

Therefore, young people need special consideration, especially when undertaking higher-risk work such as using mobile plant.

## A LEGAL REQUIREMENT

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSWR) an employer has a responsibility to ensure that young persons employed by them are not exposed to risk due to:

- lack of experience
- being unaware of existing or potential risks; and
- lack of maturity

For the purpose of these regulations, a young person is anyone under the age of 18, and a child is anyone who has not reached the MSLA. Pupils reach the MSLA at the end of the school year in which they turn 16. In Scotland, pupils turning 16 between 1 March and 30 September can leave school after 31 May of that year, while those turning 16 between 1 October and the end of February can leave at the start of the Christmas holidays in that school year.



## THE RISK ASSESSMENT

MHSWR requires a specific assessment of risks to which young workers may be exposed, taking account of their inexperience, lack of awareness of risks and immaturity. The risk should consider these specific factors.

- The young person's inexperience, lack of awareness of risks, and immaturity.
- The nature of the workplace and workstation.
- Exposure to physical, biological, and chemical agents.
- The work equipment and the way in which it is handled.
- The organisation of processes and activities.
- The extent of the health and safety training provided or to be provided to young persons.
- Risks from agents, processes and work listed in the Annex to Directive 94/33/EC on the protection of young people at work.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF INDUCTION

Given the additional risks that are a consequence of the employment of young persons, it is important that all young person's receive documented information, instruction, and training before they start working. This induction training should not be postponed as many injuries occur during this initial period.

The induction should include a basic introduction to health and safety. It should be remembered that young persons and trainees on work experience are regarded in health and safety law as employees. Therefore, they must be provided with the same health and safety protection and welfare facilities as other employees.

This induction will include the arrangements for first aid and accidents, details of the emergency evacuation procedure, the reporting of unsafe acts and conditions, welfare facilities, and the law on working time. In some organisations it may be necessary to include detail about the arrangements for personal safety and freedom from sexual harassment, violence and aggression or bullying.

While there is no formal licensing scheme for using materials handling equipment at work, the law does require that each operator is given adequate training by their employer so that they are competent to operate the machinery which they use (the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998; regulation 9).

The training should be for the type of machinery to be used: for instance, the skills for using a reach type lift truck can be different to those of using a counterbalance truck. Training provided for one type is not interchangeable with another.

Finally, before the young person starts their first task, adequate supervision by a competent person must be in place and a check carried out to confirm that the young worker has understood the information, instruction and training they need to work safely.





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