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WARNING TO YOUNGSTERS TAKING ON CHRISTMAS JOBS

Youngsters taking on holiday jobs to earn extra cash in the run-up to Christmas are being warned against unscrupulous employers who put profit before safety.

David Marshall, president of the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL), said he was deeply concerned about young workers' safety after hearing several horror stories in which youngsters were seriously injured because bosses ignored health and safety rules.

“Young workers have rights,” he said, “and these include the right to be trained in how to carry out their jobs safely, and the right to refuse work which could put their health and safety in danger.”

“What we are concerned about are the employers who think they can ignore these rights, and cut corners on safety simply to save a bit of money.”

APIL member Jeanette Miller says many young workers are roped into jobs which are unsafe because they are often too afraid to stand up for their rights.

“Employers have a duty to ensure young workers are not put at risk in the workplace,” she said. “But all too often a young employee will agree to do a certain job – even though it may risk their safety - because they daren't say no to the boss.”

Citing the case of a teenager employed as a pot washer in a pub kitchen, Jeanette is only too familiar with what can go wrong when safety measures aren't a priority.

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“This particular young man was told, along with other members of staff, to scrub the walls of the pub kitchen because the brewery did not want to pay for professional steam cleaners, even though the Environmental Health Authority had told them to do so,” she said. “The young man was up a ladder scrubbing the walls – as he had been told to - but he slipped and fell off, and his arm plunged into the flash fryer causing severe burns.

“His dexterity has been affected and he has since undergone several skin grafts,” continued Jeanette. “As a result, his dreams of a career in computing – not to mention the fact that he was a budding ice hockey player – have all been thrown into question because it seems his employers put profit before safety.”

APIL is calling on all bosses who employ youngsters to be aware of their responsibilities.

“It simply isn’t worth cutting corners on safety just to save a few pounds,” said David. “The consequences of sloppy health and safety practises can have horrific consequences and can ruin lives.

“We don’t want youngsters to be put off earning extra cash for Christmas, neither do we want all bosses to be tarred with the same brush,” he said. “What we do want is health and safety to be top priority in every business, and for youngsters to speak up if all is not well.”

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Note to editors: Jeanette Miller is a solicitor at J S Miller Solicitors in Manchester.

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