

AP319

December 2006

STUDENTS URGED TO SPEAK UP OVER WORKPLACE SAFETY FEARS

Students across the country taking on seasonal work in the run up to Christmas are being warned about bosses who turn a blind eye to safety.

Thousands of students are at risk of being injured while at work because of sloppy health and safety practices, according to Richard Langton, president of national campaigning organisation APIL (Association of Personal Injury Lawyers).

“We hear horror stories all the time about young people being seriously injured – or even killed – because bosses have failed to put safety at the top of the agenda,” said Richard. “Around 13,000 young workers are injured every year in the UK – that’s a young worker injured every 40 minutes.”*

Richard says problems can stem from a lack of time and investment in proper health and safety training, or inexperienced workers being given jobs beyond their capabilities, for example.

“Young workers have rights,” says Richard, “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.”

Jeanette Miller, a lawyer and APIL member, says young workers are often too afraid to stand up for their rights, even when they are asked to carry out jobs which are potentially dangerous.

“Young people sometimes do not have the confidence to say no to their employer, or even question what they are being asked to do,” she says. “But employers have a duty to ensure young workers are not put at risk – ignoring that duty can have tragic consequences.”

Jeanette has seen first hand the devastating effects of poor health and safety practices, having dealt with a sixteen year old who suffered severe burns while working in a pub kitchen.

“Bradley was injured four years ago and as a result, his life has been turned upside down,” she says. “He was working as a pot washer and 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.

“He was on a ladder scrubbing walls but slipped and fell off,” she says. “His arm plunged into the deep fat fryer and he was horrifically burnt. His whole life has been affected – his exam results suffered; dreams of a career in computing ended as his dexterity was affected and he’s had to have several skin grafts.”

Unfortunately, Bradley’s is not an isolated case. As Richard Langton says, there are thousands of students in the UK and many will be undertaking holiday work.

“We know there are many decent, safety conscious bosses out there,” says Richard. “What we are concerned about are those who are not so vigilant, and we want young workers to be aware of dangers and recognise that they do have rights, even if they are only working a few hours a week in the run up to Christmas.

“We want all bosses who employ young workers to be aware of their responsibilities,” he says. “It isn’t worth cutting corners on safety just to save a few pounds – the consequences can ruin lives. Health and safety must be a top priority in every business and, more importantly, youngsters mustn’t be afraid to speak up if they are in any doubt.”

-ends-

Note to editors:

- APIL was set up in 1990 by a small group of solicitors who wanted to provide a voice for injured people, and is now a recognised voice within Government and other organisations. APIL’s SafetyWatch campaign aims to highlight potential hazards to people in order to prevent injury. Visit www.apil.com
- Approximately 13,000 young workers are injured each year in the UK (source: www.hazards.org – report titled “Too young to die”)
- APIL’s president Richard Langton is available for interview. In the first instance, please contact APIL’s Press & PR Officer Lisa Wardle, t:: 0115 9388715

For any further information or enquiries, contact:

Lisa Wardle
Press & PR Officer
Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL)
Telephone: 0115 9388715