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Philadelphia Project on Occupational Safety and Health (PhilaPOSH)
Southern California Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (SoCalCOSH)
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David Michaels, Head of US OSHA, Praises Teen Efforts to Prevent Workplace Violence

Retail Store Homicides Highlight Risks Facing Teen Workers; 200,000 Sexual Assaults Each Year

Washington, DC – David Michaels, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health, said today that teen peer education programs are an effective way to reduce and prevent the hazards of workplace violence.

“This is a unique opportunity to reach out to young workers with life-saving information,” said Michaels, who heads the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). “Of course it’s the employer’s responsibility to provide a safe workplace. But educating young workers to identify hazardous situations can give them the confidence they need to speak up at work and ask for the training and protections they need to be safe.”

Michaels joined teenagers from Boston, Philadelphia and San Francisco today for a telephone press conference about Teens Lead @ Work, a peer education program sponsored by non-profit and academic organizations in Massachusetts, New York, Philadelphia and San Francisco.

The ongoing hazards faced by teenagers in the workplace have been dramatically illustrated by recent fatalities, including:

- Joseph Morante, 19, who was fatally shot in 2013 while working at a cell phone store in Boston.
- Jamil Bader, Jr, 18, who was shot and killed in 2012 during a robbery at his family's delicatessen in Newark, NJ.
- Christine LoBrutto, 18, who was shot and killed in 2012 by a co-worker while working on the 3rd shift stocking shelves at the Pathmark store in Old Bridge, NJ.

Sexual assault is also a widespread risk for young workers. A recent study by the Shuster Institute for Investigative Journalism at Brandeis University estimates that 200,000 U.S. young workers annually are victims of sexual assault at work.

"Workplace violence affects teens all over the nation so it is important that every worker – especially young workers – know about their rights and resources," said Alice Kuang, 16, a peer leader with UC Berkeley's Labor Occupational Health Program.

Kuang and Wendell Skinner, 15, of Philadelphia and Justin Caballero, 17, of Boston are involved in peer education programs which educate young workers how to recognize and prevent workplace hazards.

The training sessions, which will reach hundreds of young workers this summer in Boston, New York, Philadelphia and San Francisco, include information about rights and responsibilities in the workplace. Through role play and discussion, peer educators also illustrate how to respond to common hazards, such as how to reduce the risk of violence during robberies at retail establishments.

"Sadly, the workplace can bring great loss to young innocent workers," said Skinner.

"With this training, the three key things I hope young workers learn are, be mindful, be watchful and beware."

"Some people may be wondering if people my age can do this kind of work, and I tell them we can," said Peer Leader Justin Caballero. "MassCOSH's Teens Lead @ Work has been around since 2002, and year after year, we have been talking to more and more teens about how to stay safe on the job just as many of them are starting to work. I've been doing these trainings for almost two years and I can tell you from experience that we are good at what we do, and that going national will help a ton of young worker stay safe on the job."

"As a pro-small business organization in Dorchester MA, we are excited about the opportunity to educate employers about how to develop safe policies and employee training that respond to shoplifting and other potentially unsafe situations with the goal of a safer business district," said Rosanne Foley, Executive Director of Fields Corner Main Street.

A recent survey of teen retail workers by the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH) found that:

- 74% never received training on workplace violence or health and safety
- 27% had experienced a theft at their workplace
- 31% of young workers sometimes worked without supervision

To address the lack of training available for young people, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) provided a safety training grant to establish the Teens Lead @ Work program.

Teens Lead @ Work is sponsored by the Massachusetts Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH), in cooperation with the Labor Occupational Health Program at the University of California Berkeley, the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH); the Philadelphia Project on Occupational Safety and Health (PhilaPOSH) and the Southern California Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (SoCalCOSH).