

Media Release

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Report Finds Significant Increase in Injury Claims For Children Getting Hurt on the Job

(Vancouver, BC) First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition today announced the release of a new report that examines the effect of changes to BC's laws governing child labour in 2004. *What's Happening to Our Children? A Look at Child Work-Related Injury Claims in BC Over the Past 10 Years*, found a startling increase in the number of child work-place injury claims accepted by WorkSafeBC since the work-start age was lowered to 12 in late 2003.

"When the government was contemplating changes back in 2003, child and youth advocates were very concerned about how removing the permit system would affect children in BC," commented Adrienne Montani, First Call's provincial coordinator. "The data presented in this report shows a ten-fold increase in accepted injury claims for 12 to 14 year olds over the period since the law changed. This is more than a wake up call – it's a serious problem."

Key Findings

Beginning in 2004, a year after the law was changed, accepted injury claims began to increase in all age groups examined (14 and under, 15 and 16 year-olds). The only exception was 2008 when accepted claims for 15 and 16-year-olds dropped slightly. Injury claims for children under 15 continued to increase through 2008.

For all age groups, injury claims were significantly higher after 2005 than they were in any previous year.

In 2008, WorkSafeBC accepted 42 claims for job-related injuries to children age 14 and under. This represents a ten-fold increase in claims over a four-year period.

Between 2003 and 2007, 12 to 14 year olds working in the following five sectors experienced the highest rates of injury: accommodation and food services, retail, agriculture, general construction and food and beverage manufacturing.

The report looks at the potential causes of this alarming injury trend and concludes that increasing injury claims are related to increasing work force participation, lack of protection and government oversight and the effort to shift responsibility for assessing workplace safety onto parents. The report also identifies a lack of reliable information about how many children are working in BC since a permit is no longer required to hire anyone over the age of twelve.

Recommendations arising from the report include:

The provincial government must develop and enact legislation to protect children from work-related injuries. This includes bringing BC's legislative and regulatory framework into compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The federal government must take seriously the safety of children across the country and set a high standard for all provinces.

A multi-stakeholder advisory group is needed. We recommend the government immediately establish a child labour advisory group that includes a broad representation of child and youth advocates, including young people with recent work experience in the higher injury occupations.

There is an inexcusable lack of information about how many children are working and under what conditions. The government must gather and monitor data about children in the workforce.

Conclusion

A ten-fold increase in accepted WorkSafeBC injury claims among children under 14 over the past four years is cause for serious concern. At minimum it should prompt an immediate inquiry into how to reduce the number of children being injured at work. WorkSafeBC data tells us only about the experience of children with reported injuries; it does not capture the broader experience of children in the workforce. We can assume there are things we should monitor about those broader experiences as well. We can also assume that the changes made to the *Employment Standards Act* in 2003 have not been effective at keeping working children safe.

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What's Happening to Our Children? A Look at Child Work-Related Injury Claims in BC Over the Past 10 Years is available at www.firstcallbc.org.

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