

Protecting Youth at Work: A Tale of Data, Coffee and Consequence

"I was pulling out the coffee filter to make more coffee, but it was still brewing. Hot coffee and grounds poured over my hand and wrist." –Injured teen worker

The Challenge

In 1998, sparked by an injury to a 14-year-old working at a local coffee shop, the Massachusetts Young Workers Injury Surveillance and Prevention Project (YWP) took a closer look at surveillance data for the retail bakery industry. Analysis revealed not only high injury rates among teens working in coffee shops, but a high proportion of burn injuries in shops within a single, large franchised retail bakery chain. Follow-up interviews with injured teens and worksite investigations by YWP identified the burn culprit: coffee. When teen workers went to change the coffee filters, they did not realize the machine was still brewing. They would pull out the brew baskets and hot coffee slurry would splash over their hands and wrists causing 2nd and 3rd degree burns.

The Response

In 2003, after continued outreach efforts, including presenting compelling burn injury data to franchise owners and corporate staff, corporate headquarters successfully persuaded their manufacturer to release a brew basket retrofit guard designed to deflect splash-back of hot coffee slurry away from worker hands. But years after the retrofit, YWP data continued to show coffee burn injuries to teens working in these establishments. In 2011, after additional investigations at franchised restaurant locations in Massachusetts, YWP was invited to meet one-on-one with corporate headquarters about these repeated burn injury cases. Following the meeting, YWP provided a written summary report of the meeting to headquarters, highlighting key action items—in particular, YWP's recommendation for a safer coffee machine design, and corporate's promise to follow up with their equipment manufacturer on an engineering solution. Two years later, a new brewer model underwent alpha-testing in select restaurants.

The Impact

In 2014, due to YWP's case ascertainment, case follow-up and outreach to corporate headquarters, a new coffee brewer with a funnel lock—to prevent the brew basket from being pulled out before the brewing cycle has completed—was rolled out. In 2015, over 3,700 brewer units had been purchased for more than 1,200 restaurants. While it's too soon to see the injury-reduction impact of this new design, the potential for impact is for all workers—not just teens—in over 13,000 franchised restaurants nationwide.

For more information, visit:
www.mass.gov/dph/teensatwork



Funnel lock brewer released in 2014