Labor Department proposal will update child labor rules

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Department of Labor published in today's Federal Register a proposal to update the Fair Labor Standards Act regulations governing the employment of teenage workers, a measure that will improve protections for the youngest segment of the nation's workforce.

"The proposal contains the most ambitious and far-reaching revisions to the child labor regulations in the last 30 years," said Wage and Hour Division Administrator Paul DeCamp. "It will safeguard the health and education of millions of working teens while at the same time allowing them to enjoy the benefits of a phased introduction to the workplace."

Key proposals include new bans on particularly hazardous activities such as working at poultry slaughtering plants, riding as passengers on forklifts, fighting forest fires, and loading and operating non-paper products balers and compacters. The department proposes to expand employment opportunities for 14- and 15-year-olds in industries such as advertising, banking and information technology -- fields that increasingly demand experience in a competitive 21st century labor market. The proposal also would prohibit 14- and 15-year-olds from employment in youth peddling activities, sometimes known as door-to-door sales.

In a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, the department is requesting comments on proposed changes to seven non-agricultural hazardous occupation orders and on suggested revisions to the rules for 14- and 15-year-olds. In an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, the department seeks information to update certain hazardous occupation orders for which there was not sufficient information to propose new rules.

This proposal is the second in a series of updates to the child labor regulations and stems from a 2002 National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health review of the child labor hazardous occupation orders. In December 2004, the department issued final regulations that, among other modifications, expanded protections for youth working in roofing and restaurant cooking.

Under the Fair Labor Standards Act, 14- and 15-year-olds may work only in occupations explicitly authorized by the Secretary of Labor by regulation and only under conditions that do not interfere with their schooling or health and well-being. Sixteen and 17-year-olds, on the other hand, may work in any occupations except those

that the secretary has found to be "particularly hazardous" or "detrimental to their health or well-being."

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