

OSHA Occupational Safety & Health Administration
U.S. Department of Labor



NATIONAL CENSUS OF FATAL OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES, 1996

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Largely as a result of reductions in job-related homicides and electrocutions, the number of fatal work injuries fell in 1996 to 6,112, the lowest level in the five-year history of the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. The downward trend in the past two years reversed the increases reported in 1993 and 1994. (See table 1.)

Job-related electrocutions dropped 20 percent, and homicides fell 12 percent from 1995 to 1996. In contrast, fatalities from falls to lower levels continued to rise, reaching a five-year high. Half of the fatal falls occurred in the construction industry. This release profiles these and other fatal work injuries by type of event,

occupation, industry, demographic characteristics of the worker, and state where injury occurred.

Profiles of 1996 fatal work injuries

Highway traffic incidents and homicides continued to lead all other events that resulted in fatal work injuries in 1996. These two events totaled over a third of the work injury deaths that occurred during the year. (See table 1 and chart 1.)

Work-related highway deaths accounted for 22 percent of the 6,112 fatal work injuries in 1996. Slightly over half of the highway fatality victims were driving or riding in a truck. The following table shows the most common vehicles occupied by highway fatality victims:

Vehicle	Number	Percent
Truck	746	56
Semitrailer truck	352	27
Pickup truck	144	11
Delivery truck	37	3
Dump truck	31	2
Automobile	345	26
Van	73	6
Tractor	25	2
Other or not reported	135	10

Off-road transport-related incidents (such as tractors or forklifts overturning) and workers being struck by vehicles each accounted for about 6 percent of worker fatalities. Air, rail, and water transport together accounted for another 8 percent.

Homicide, the second leading cause of job-related deaths, accounted for 15 percent of fatal work injuries in 1996. Work-related homicides fell 12 percent below the 1995 total and 16 percent below 1994, when job-related homicides recorded a five-year high. While most industry divisions had declines in the number of job-related homicides, retail trade and services had slight increases over 1995. Managers of food serving and lodging establishments and sales supervisors and proprietors were particularly affected by the increases. Taxicab drivers had one of the largest declines in homicides.

Robbery was the primary motive of job-related homicides. Almost half of the homicide victims worked in retail establishments, such as grocery stores and eating and drinking establishments, where cash is readily available. Disputes among coworkers and with customers and clients accounted for about one-seventh of the homicide total. Many of these homicides were committed after the worker was fired or the customer or tenant was asked to leave the premises. Arguments with customers and clients ranged from disagreements over monetary issues, such as rental or legal fees owed and quality of goods or services received, to disputes over refusal to serve alcohol. Domestic disputes accounted for one-sixth of the workplace homicides for female workers.

Circumstances or alleged perpetrator	Number	Percent
Robberies and other crimes	726	80
Work associates	129	14
Coworker, former coworker	75	8
Customer, client	54	6

Relatives	31	3
Husband, ex-husband	20	2
Other relative	11	1
Other personal acquaintances	26	3
Boyfriend, ex-boyfriend	11	1
Other acquaintance	15	2

Falls continued to rise in 1996, accounting for 11 percent of the fatal work injuries. One-fifth were from or through roofs; falls from scaffolding and from ladders each accounted for about one-seventh. While still relatively small in number, falls from nonmoving vehicles rose by almost two-thirds over the previous year.

Nine percent of the fatally injured workers were struck by various objects, such as falling trees, machinery or vehicles that had slipped into gear, and various building materials. Fatalities resulting from being struck by falling objects were at their highest level since the fatality census began in 1992. An increase in the number of workers killed by falling trees and tree limbs in 1996 was partly responsible for the higher level in 1996.

Job-related electrocutions dropped below 300 for the first time in the five-year period and accounted for 5 percent of worker deaths in 1996. Construction trade workers, such as painters, electricians, and carpenters, accounted for a large portion of the decline from the 1995 total. Two-fifths of the worker deaths from electrocution resulted from the worker or equipment being used coming in contact with overhead power lines.

On average, about 17 workers were fatally injured each day during 1996. Eighty-four percent of fatally injured workers died the

day they were injured; 97 percent died within 30 days. There were 189 multiple fatality incidents (incidents that resulted in two or more worker deaths) resulting in 546 job-related deaths. This was about 10 percent fewer multiple fatality incidents than in 1995 when 217 events resulted in 686 fatal work injuries.

Occupation highlights (table 2 and chart 2):

* Occupations with large numbers of fatal injuries included truck drivers, construction trades, farm occupations, and sales occupations.

* The specific events or exposures responsible for workers' deaths varied considerably among occupations. Highway crashes, jackknifings, and rollovers together accounted for about two-thirds of the truck drivers' deaths, while homicides accounted for about three-fifths of the fatalities among workers in sales occupations. Slightly over one-third of the deaths in farm occupations occurred in tractor-related incidents, and about two-fifths of worker deaths in construction trades resulted from falls to lower levels.

Industry highlights (table 3):

* The construction industry accounted for one out of every six fatal work injuries that occurred during 1996.

* Industry divisions with large numbers of fatalities relative to their employment include agriculture, forestry, and fishing; construction; transportation and public utilities; and mining.

Relative risk (tables 3 and 4):

A comparison of percent distributions of fatalities and employment, can be used to evaluate the relative risk of a job-related fatality for a given occupation, industry, or worker characteristic. For example, the construction industry accounted for about 17 percent of the fatality total, about 3 times its 6-percent share of total employment. While employment can be used to evaluate the relative risk of a fatal work injury, other measures, such as employee exposure hours, also can be used. (The annual average employment data shown in tables 3 and 4 are from the Current Population Survey.)

State highlights (table 5):

* In general, states that have the largest number of persons employed also reported the largest number of work-related fatalities. Twelve of the largest states accounted for almost half of the total fatality count; three of these 12 states--California, Texas, and Florida--accounted for one-fourth of the total. A state's industry mix, however, also must be considered when evaluating its occupational fatality profile, especially when large numbers of workers are employed in relatively dangerous industries, such as agriculture, mining, and construction.

* Five states reported changes of 20 or more fatalities that represented at least a 20 percent difference compared with 1995. Major disasters, such as the Oklahoma City bombing or an airline crash, can cause substantial year-to-year fluctuations in occupational fatality totals.

State	1995	1996	Numeric change	Percent change	Contributing factor
Colorado	112	90	-22	-20	General decline
Louisiana	139	103	-36	-26	Fewer air and water vehicle incidents
Mississippi	128	103	-25	-20	Fewer transport- related incidents
Oklahoma	200	87	-113	-57	Federal building bombing in 1995
Pennsylvania	233	282	49	21	General increase

Background of the program

The Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, part of the BLS safety and health statistics program, provides the most complete count of fatal work injuries available because it uses diverse state and federal data sources to identify, verify, and profile fatal work injuries. Information about each workplace fatality (occupation and other worker characteristics, equipment being used, and circumstances of the event) is obtained by cross-referencing source documents, such as death certificates, workers' compensation records, and reports to federal and state agencies. This method assures counts are as complete

and accurate as possible.

This is the fifth year that the fatality census has been conducted in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The BLS fatality census is a federal/state cooperative venture in which costs are shared equally. Additional state-specific data are available from the participating state agencies listed in table 6.

Another Bureau program, the Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, profiles worker and case characteristics of nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses that result in lost worktime and presents frequency counts and incidence rates by industry. Copies of the 1995 news release on nonfatal injuries and illnesses are available from BLS by calling (202) 606-6304. Incidence rates for 1996 by industry will be published in December 1997, and information on 1996 worker and case characteristics will be available in April 1998. For additional occupational safety and health data, access the BLS World Wide Web Internet site: <http://www.bls.gov/oshhome.htm>.

- [Table 1. Fatal occupational injuries by event or exposure, 1992-1996](#)
- [Table 2. Fatal occupational injuries by occupation and major event or exposure, 1996](#)
- [Table 3. Fatal occupational injuries and employment by industry, 1996](#)
- [Table 4. Fatal occupational injuries and employment by selected worker characteristics, 1996](#)
- [Table 5. Fatal occupational injuries by State and event or exposure, 1996](#)
- [Table 6. CFOI participating State agencies and telephone numbers](#)
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