

# ON-THE-JOB FATALITIES ON THE DECLINE

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**A** total of 5,524 fatal work injuries were recorded in 2002, a decline of 6.6 percent from 2001, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor.

The count for 2002 was the lowest ever recorded by the fatality census, which has been conducted yearly since 1992. The fatality rate also reached a new low of 4.0 fatal work injuries per 100,000 workers in 2002.

In 2001, 5,915 fatal work injuries occurred, excluding the 2,886 work-related fatalities that resulted from the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

## PROFILE OF 2002 FATAL WORK INJURIES BY TYPE OF INCIDENT

Fatal highway incidents were down 3 percent from 2001, but continued to be the most frequent type of fatal workplace event in 2002, accounting for about a quarter of all fatal work injuries. Other types of fatal transportation events also declined, including aircraft incidents (down 22 percent) and workers struck by vehicle or mobile equipment (down 7 percent). Overall, fatal work injuries from transportation incidents declined for the fourth year in a row, from 2,645 in 1998 to 2,381 in 2002.

Workplace homicides were down about 5 percent in 2002, from 643 in 2001 to 609 in 2002. This was the lowest number recorded in the fatality census and represented a 44 percent decline from the high of 1,080 workplace homicides recorded in 1994. Workplace suicides also were down in 2002.

Fatalities resulting from falls declined for the first time since 1998, from 810 in 2001 to 714 in 2002, a drop of 12 percent.

The only major fatality event recording an increase was exposure to harmful substances or environments (up 8 percent). The increase in this event category was led by a sharp increase in the number of fatalities involving contact with temperature extremes, which increased from 35 fatalities in 2001 to 60 in 2002. Electrocutions also increased slightly in 2002.

## PROFILE OF FATAL INJURIES BY INDUSTRY

Construction continued to record the highest number of fatal injuries of any major industry, although the total for construction was down 9 percent from the series high recorded in 2001. Fatal work injuries in mining also were lower, due to declines in coal mining and in oil and gas extraction. Fatal work injuries in manufacturing, transportation and public utilities, retail and wholesale trade, services, and government also declined from 2001 levels.

Fatal work injuries in the agriculture, forestry, and fishing industry increased about 6 percent in 2002. Fatal work injuries in commercial fishing—historically one of the more hazardous industries—were down sharply, from 60 in 2001 to 31 in 2002.

Rates of fatal work injury in 2002 were highest in the mining, agriculture/ forestry/ fishing, construction, and transportation /public utilities

industries. The mining industry recorded a rate of 23.5 fatal work injuries per 100,000 workers in 2002, the highest of any major industry, but down about 22 percent from the rate recorded in 2001. Fatal work injury rates for all other major industries also were down in 2002, except in finance, insurance, and real estate (unchanged) and in transportation and public utilities (up slightly).

## PROFILE OF FATAL INJURIES BY OCCUPATION

Operators, fabricators, and laborers accounted for 1,895 fatal work injuries in 2002, the most of any major occupational group and about a third of the fatal work injuries reported in 2002. However, the number of fatalities for this group declined for the third consecutive year and was down about 7 percent from 2001. Fatal work injuries among machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors were down sharply in 2002.

Fatal work injuries among construction laborers also declined in 2002, from a series high of 350 in 2001 to 302 fatalities in 2002—a decline of 14 percent. However, fatalities among laborers, except construction, were higher by about 8 percent in 2002. Overall, fatalities in handler, equipment cleaner, helper, and laborer occupations were down about 10 percent. Truck drivers—who had more fatal injuries than any other individual occupation—recorded 808 fatal work injuries, a slight increase.

Precision production, craft, and repair workers accounted for 1,104 fatal work injuries in 2002 or about one-fifth of the overall total. While fatal work injuries in this occupational group were down about 3 percent overall in 2002, fatalities in the construction trades sub-group were slightly higher. The 682 fatal work injuries in the construction trades in 2002 was the highest recorded by the fatality census for that group.

Roofers, electricians, brick masons, and painters were among the construction trades recording increases. Mechanics and repairers recorded a lower number.

Service occupations also recorded fewer fatal work injuries in 2002 down 6 percent, as did managerial and professional specialty occupations (down 20 percent) and technical, sales, and administrative support occupations (down 7 percent). The number of fatal work injuries in farming, forestry, and fishing, however, increased from 804 in 2001 to 840 in 2002. In that group, forestry and logging workers, groundskeepers, farm workers, and farming operators/ managers were among the occupations recording increases. □