

# SELECTED SUMMARY OF THREE BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS REPORTS RELEASED ON WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

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The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released three reports over the past several months reporting on injuries and death in the workplace.

## **FATAL WORKPLACE INJURIES AND ILLNESSES**

The first report, issued on August 4, 1999, is entitled National Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1998. The number of workplace homicides continued to fall during 1998, reaching its lowest level in seven years. In 1994 there were 1080 workplace homicides compared to 709 in 1998 – a decrease of 34% for the five-year period. Retail trade saw the greatest percentage decrease in the number of homicides for the five-year period (46%). Over the

past year, workplace homicides declined as follows:

Industry overall	-18%
Retail trade	-28%
Grocery stores	-33%
Eating/drinking places	-37%
Gas/service stations	-29%
Taxicab	-35%
Detective/armored car	-14%
Police protection	-18%

As in years past, robbery was the primary motive in two-thirds of all homicides in the workplace. Motive was not always able to be determined from the source documents, so this statistic is based on the number of cases where motive could be ascertained.

To put the number of workplace homicides into perspective, the United States overall experienced an 8% decline in homicides from 1997 to 1998.

The number of workplace homicides dropped 18% between those two years.

Highway crashes are by far the leading cause of death in the workplace. In 1998, 24% of fatal work injuries were a result of traffic accidents. In 1997, for the first time since the BLS started reporting on-the-job fatality information, women were killed on the job more often by traffic accidents than by homicide. In 1998, however, the leading cause of death for women in the workplace returned to homicide. Traffic accidents continue to be the leading cause of death in the workplace for males.

### ***Industry Differences***

Even though the retail industry is at risk for death from homicide, they do not have nearly the overall fatality risk rate of other industries. We just hear more about homicides. The industries with larger numbers of fatalities relative to their employment are:

- ◆ Agriculture, forestry, and fishing
- ◆ Construction
- ◆ Transportation and public utilities
- ◆ Mining

The construction industry, for example, accounts for 19% of the fatality total, over three times its 6%

share of total employment. All of the industries above are more dangerous than retail for death on the job. For retail, the number of deaths is in the other direction – lower than their numbers of employment share. Retail makes up 17% of total employment, but accounts for only 9% of deaths.

The number of fatal work injuries in retail trade dropped 15% from 1997, primarily due to a decline in workplace homicides. If a sales worker is killed on the job, it is, however, more likely to be from homicide than any other cause. About one-half of the deaths of sales workers (53%) on the job are due to homicide. Robbery is the primary motive.

### ***Nature of the Crimes***

The percentage of workplace homicides resulting from shootings held steady at the 1997 level of 80%. Nine percent of homicides were by stabbing in 1998, and the remaining 11% fell into the “other” category, which included bombings.

### ***Males/Females***

Males make up 54% of the workplace, and women make up 46%. Over ten times more men than women were

killed on the job in 1998. Men accounted for 92% of the workplace deaths, and women for 8% in 1998.

Of the 5,544 men who died on the job, 23% of those deaths were a result of highway incidents, 11% were a result of falls, and 10% from homicide. Of the 482 women who died on the job in 1998, 34% of those were a result of homicide, and 29% resulted from highway incidents.

### ***NON-FATAL WORKPLACE INJURIES AND ILLNESSES***

A second report was issued on December 16, 1999, entitled Workplace Injuries and Illnesses in 1998, and a third report was issued on April 20, 2000, entitled Lost-Worktime Injuries and Illnesses: Characteristics and Resulting Time Away From Work, 1998. These two reports cover non-fatal injuries and illnesses suffered in the workplace. The December report deals with injuries and illnesses on the job which did not require time off work. The April report addresses injuries incurred on the job which did require time off work.

The vast majority of workplace injuries are sprains, strains, and tears, accounting for approximately 40% of all workplace injuries. Bruises, contusions, cuts, and lacerations are distant followers. Overexertion while maneuvering and/or contact with objects were the leading causes of injuries in every major industry division.

Assaults and violent acts by a person accounted for less than 1% (0.8%) of all workplace injuries in the retail trade. In the services sector, assaults and violent acts accounted for three times that amount (3.3%) of all injuries. That translates to an occurrence rate of 1.4 per 10,000 workers for the retail trade sector, and 5.0 per 10,000 for the service industries, whereas contact with objects and equipment resulted in 27.8% of all workplace injuries in retail trade, and 18.4% in services.

### ***CONCLUSION***

Throughout the decade of the '90's, it has become increasingly safer to go to work. The number of homicides in the workplace has dropped by a third (34%) since 1993. The number of

robbery-related homicides in stores and restaurants has dropped even more -- 46% since 1994. As with explanations for the decrease in crime generally, many factors have likely contributed to our safer workplaces. One reason often cited is the strategy to reduce violent events which has been in place for over two decades now in certain retail settings. That strategy incorporates the validated crime-reducing measures of good cash control, adequate lighting inside and outside stores, training employees in safety and anti-violence measures, limiting escape routes, and maintaining good visibility throughout the store.

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#### **Data Collection Methods**

The Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries data for workplace injuries utilizes a combination of data-gathering techniques. The BLS relies on death certificates, worker's compensation reports and claims, reports to regulatory agencies, medical examiner reports, police reports and news reports.