

# SELECTED SUMMARY OF BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS REPORT RELEASED ON WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Sandra J. Erickson, M.F.S.<sup>1</sup>  
Rosemary J. Erickson, Ph.D.<sup>2</sup>  
Athena Research Corporation  
San Diego, CA October 6, 2000

---

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released its annual report on fatal workplace injuries on August 17, 2000, entitled National Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1999 (CFOI). The number of workplace homicides continued to fall during 1999. Overall, it ranked third on the list of leading causes of workplace fatalities, falling from a rank of second in 1998. Highway fatalities were the leading cause of death, followed by falls. In 1999, there were 645 job-related homicides compared to 714 in 1998.

There has been a 40% decrease in workplace homicides since 1994, when the number was 1,080. Retail trade saw the greatest percentage decrease in the number of homicides for the period since 1994, at 51%. Grocery stores<sup>3</sup> had a 61% reduction during that same period, gas stations had a 59% reduction, and taxicabs had a 41% reduction.

Over the past year, workplace homicides decreased in most categories, such as grocery stores, with a decrease of 20%. By contrast, taxicabs experienced an increase of 6% and eating/drinking establishments an increase of 27%. Table 1 shows the number of workplace homicides in selected industries with changes over the past year.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sandra J. Erickson holds a Master's in Forensic Science. She is a research associate at Athena Research Corporation.

<sup>2</sup> Rosemary J. Erickson holds a Ph.D. in Sociology: Justice. She is president of Athena Research Corporation.

**Table 1: Workplace Homicides in Selected Industries**

	1998	1999	Percentage Change
Total homicides	714	645	-10%
Retail trade	286	260	-9%
Grocery stores	95	76	-20%
Eating/drinking establishments	69	94	+27%
Gas/service stations	24	17	-29%
Taxicab	48	51	+6%
Detective and armored car services	18	17	-6%
Police/firefighters/guards	50	41	-18%

As in years past, robbery was the primary motive for homicides in the workplace. Typically, robbery accounts for two-thirds of all workplace homicides. Violence by co-workers and customers or clients was a distant second. 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.

Workplace homicides fell at a greater percentage in 1999 than did homicides overall in the United States. The FBI's preliminary data for 1999 show a decline in homicides nationwide of 8%, with workplace homicides dropping 10%.

In 1999, highway crashes (25%) continue to be the leading cause by far of death in the workplace, followed by falls (12%), and homicides (11%) dropped to the third leading cause. Traffic accidents, not homicide, were the leading cause of death for both males and females in 1999. Homicide had returned as the leading cause of death for females in the workplace in 1998, following a change in 1997, where it was not the leading cause.

### ***Industry Differences***

Occupations with a large number of homicides are typically those that engage in cash transactions or have valuables on hand, including managers of food and lodging establishments, sales supervisors and proprietors, cashiers, and taxicab drivers, according to the BLS. Despite that, **retail trade** saw a continued decline in its number

---

<sup>3</sup> The BLS places convenience stores in the "grocery store" category.

of 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, accounted for 20% of the fatalities 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 made up 17% of total employment, but accounted for only 8% of deaths.

The number of fatal work injuries in retail trade dropped 11% from 1998, 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 (51%) on the job are due to homicide, and robbery is the primary motive.

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

The percentage of workplace homicides resulting from shootings dropped from 1998 to 1999, from 574 to 506, a decrease of 12%. The number of homicides by stabbing remained nearly the same – 61 in 1998 and 60 in 1999. The “other” category, which included bombings, remained exactly the same at 79 in both 1998 and 1999. The decrease of homicides in the workplace resulted almost totally from incidents involving shootings.

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

Males make up 54% of the workplace, and women make up 46%. Over twelve times more men than women were killed on the job in 1999. Men accounted for 93% of the workplace deaths, and women for 7% in 1999.

In 1999, 6,023 people died on the job. Of the 5,582 men who died on the job, 24% of those deaths were a result of highway incidents, 12% were the result of falls,

and 9% resulted from homicide. Of the 441 women who died on the job in 1999, 34% of those were a result of highway incidents, and 29% resulted from homicide.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the media attention given to workplace violence, the number of homicides occurring at work continues to decrease, even though there is an increase in employment nationwide. Homicides in the workplace have dropped at a much higher percentage than homicide overall. Since 1994 (the year with the highest count of homicides since the BLS began the fatality census), workplace homicides have dropped from 1,080 in 1994 to 645 in 1999, a 40% decline. Grocery stores have a 61% reduction during that same period, gas stations have a 59% reduction, and taxicabs have a 41% reduction. As with the explanations for the decrease in crime generally, many factors have likely contributed to safer workplaces. One reason often given is the strategy to reduce violent events that 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.

---

## **Data Collection Methods**

The BLS CFOI 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.