The changing composition of lost-workday injuries

Restricted-activity days are becoming a more common aspect of occupational injury and illness cases at the same time that days away from work are becoming shorter and less frequent; increased job safety and the faster return to work of injured workers may account for this development

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Occupational injury and illness rates have changed notably in recent years. The overall rate has declined every year since 1992, from 8.9 cases per 100 workers in that year to 7.1 in 1997. The latter rate is the lowest since the Bureau of Labor Statistics began reporting this information in the early 1970s. Further, the composition of workplace injuries and illnesses has changed dramatically in the past decade. Cases with lost work time are now less likely to involve days away from work and more likely to involve only restricted work activity. Even when injured or ill workers do take time off work to recuperate, they are now more likely to return to work sooner, but unable to perform all job duties. Restricted work activity due to workplace injury or illness is a growing phenomenon in the U.S. workplace, indicative both of a possible decrease in the severity of reported cases and of a trend toward the faster return to work of affected workers. To varying extents, the latter trend appears in all industrial sectors, in different-sized establishments, and for all kinds of injuries and illnesses. This article presents evidence of this important compositional change in occupational injuries and illnesses.

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Trends from 1976 to 1997

Since 1972, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has collected occupational injury and illness data on an annual basis from logs that employers maintain according to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines. Private-industry establishments surveyed by the Bureau are asked to report the numbers of injuries and illnesses of various types that occurred in the previous year, along with an estimate of the number of hours worked by all employees in that year. The Bureau then calculates rates of injuries and illnesses by industry and establishment size, usually expressed as the number of cases per 100 or 10,000 full-time equivalent workers.

Workplace injury and illness cases are divided between those that do and those that do not involve lost work time after the day an injury or illness is sustained. Lost-workday cases include both those with days away from work and those with days with restricted work activity only. When an injured or ill worker took no time away from work (except possibly on the day of the injury), but could not perform all normal job tasks for some period of time, the case is labeled a restricted-activity-only case. In contrast, days-away-from-work cases involve some time off work (not counting the day of the injury) and may also include some days of restricted work activity.

In the early years of the BLS survey, cases with only restricted activity accounted for a small per-

centage of all lost-workday cases. However, over the past decade, BLS data show that the rate of cases with only restricted activity has risen, while the rate for days-away-from-work cases has generally fallen. (See chart 1 and table 1.) From 1978 to 1986, the annual rate in private industry for cases with only restricted work activity remained constant at 0.3 per 100 full-time equivalent workers. Since 1986, the rate has risen steadily to 1.2 cases per 100 workers in 1997, a fourfold increase over the 1986 rate. In contrast, the rate for days-away-from-work cases dropped from 3.3 in 1986 and 3.5 in 1988 to 2.1 in 1997. Because the rate for days-away-from-work cases declined slightly more than the rate for restricted-activity cases rose, the overall lost-workday-case rate declined slightly between 1986 and 1997, from 3.6 to 3.3.

With the possible exception of finance, insurance, and real estate, every major industry division shows the same pattern of a rise in the restricted-activity-case rate and a drop in the days-away-from-work-case rate over the period from the mid-1980s to 1997. (See table 1.) The most notable compositional change has occurred in manufacturing. In 1986, that industry's rate of restricted-activity cases was 0.7 per 100 workers, while the rate for days-away-from-work cases was 4.0. By 1997, the rates for both restricted-activity and days-away-from-work cases were identical at 2.4 per 100 workers. Thus, in manufacturing, while there were 5.75 times more days-away-from-work cases than there were restricted-activity cases in 1986, roughly the same number of each type of case occurred in 1997. None of the other industry divisions displayed such a convergence in the relative proportions of cases.

Table 2 further explores the relationship between the industry studied and the change in the rate of restricted-activity cases. Shown are the 15 two-digit SIC industries with the largest changes in restricted-activity-case rates between 1986 and 1997, ranked by the size of the change (not the rate of change). Consistent with the previous table, the top 8 industries and 12 of the 15 entries listed are in manufacturing.[1] Food and kindred products (SIC 20) tops the list, with a rise in the restricted-activity-case rate of 3.7 per 100 workers. Next is transportation equipment manufacturing, with a rise of 3.0 cases. The table also shows that the rate for days-away-from-work cases declined for all of the industries listed, often with drops in excess of the rises in restricted-activity-case rates.

The size of the establishment (that is, the number of employees in it) is strongly related to the propensity for an employer to report restricted-activity cases. In both 1986 and 1997, larger employers were more likely to report these cases. (See table 3.) While establishments with 1 to 10 employees reported only two-tenths of a restricted-activity case per 100

Chart 1. National trends in rates associated with lost workdays (rates per 100 full-time equivalent workers), private industry, 1976–97

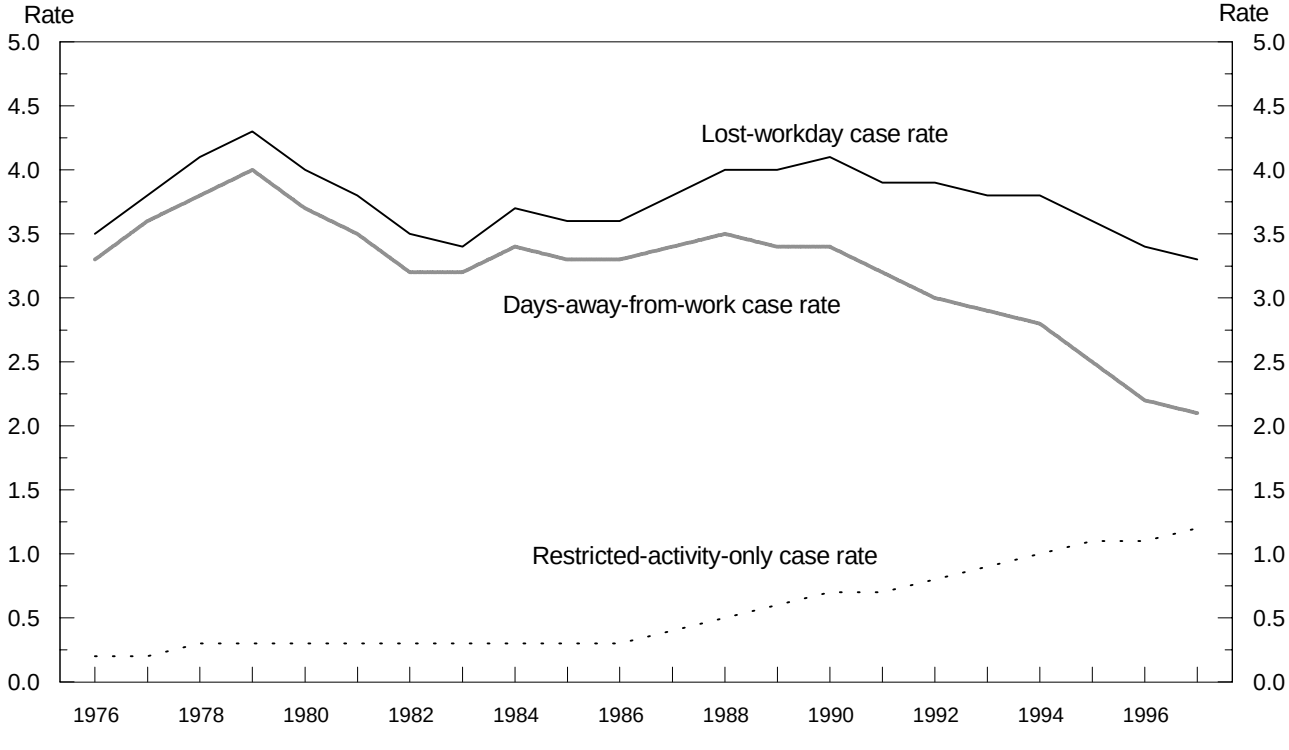

Table 1. Incidence[1] of occupational injury and illness cases involving days away from work and occupational injury and illness cases involving restricted work activity only, by industry division, private industry, 1976–97

Year[2]	Private Industry		Agriculture, forestry, and fishing		Mining		Construction		Manufacturing		Transportation and public utilities[3]		Wholesale and retail trade		Finance, insurance, and real estate		Services	
	Cases with days away from work	Cases with restricted work activity only	Cases with days away from work	Cases with restricted work activity only	Cases with days away from work	Cases with restricted work activity only	Cases with days away from work	Cases with restricted work activity only	Cases with days away from work	Cases with restricted work activity only	Cases with days away from work	Cases with restricted work activity only	Cases with days away from work	Cases with restricted work activity only	Cases with days away from work	Cases with restricted work activity only	Cases with days away from work	Cases with restricted work activity only
1976	3.3	0.2	4.6	0.1	5.6	0.2	5.4	0.1	4.4	0.4	4.6	0.4	2.8	0.0	0.7	0.0	2.0	0.0
1977	3.6	.2	5.0	.1	5.7	.2	5.8	.1	4.7	.4	4.9	.4	2.9	.1	.8	.0	2.2	.0
1978[4]	3.8	.3	5.3	.1	6.1	.4	6.3	.2	5.0	.5	5.3	.4	3.0	.1	.8	.0	2.3	.1
1979[4]	4.0	.3	5.5	.2	6.4	.4	6.6	.2	5.2	.6	5.4	.5	3.2	.2	.9	.0	2.4	.1
1980	3.7	.3	5.6	.2	6.2	.3	6.3	.2	4.8	.6	5.1	.5	3.1	.2	.8	.0	2.2	.1
1981	3.5	.3	5.7	.2	5.9	.3	6.1	.3	4.5	.6	4.8	.5	3.0	.1	.8	.0	2.3	.1
1982	3.2	.3	5.6	.3	5.2	.2	5.8	.2	3.9	.5	4.4	.5	2.9	.2	.8	.0	2.2	.1
1983[4]	3.2	.3	5.9	.2	4.2	.2	6.1	.2	3.8	.5	4.2	.5	2.9	.2	.8	.0	2.3	.1
1984[4]	3.4	.3	5.8	.3	5.2	.2	6.6	.3	4.1	.6	4.6	.5	3.1	.2	.8	.1	2.4	.1
1985	3.3	.3	5.4	.3	4.5	.3	6.5	.3	4.0	.6	4.5	.5	3.0	.2	.8	.0	2.4	.1
1986	3.3	.3	5.3	.3	3.9	.3	6.6	.3	4.0	.7	4.4	.4	3.1	.2	.8	.1	2.4	.2
1987	3.4	.4	5.3	.4	4.5	.3	6.4	.3	4.2	1.0	4.4	.5	3.2	.2	.8	.1	2.5	.2
1988	3.5	.5	5.3	.4	4.7	.4	6.5	.4	4.5	1.3	4.6	.5	3.2	.3	.9	.1	2.4	.2
1989	3.4	.6	5.2	.5	4.4	.5	6.3	.4	4.4	1.4	4.7	.6	3.2	.3	.8	.1	2.4	.2
1990	3.4	.7	5.4	.5	4.5	.5	6.2	.5	4.2	1.6	4.7	.8	3.1	.4	1.0	.1	2.5	.3
1991	3.2	.7	4.8	.6	4.0	.5	5.6	.5	3.9	1.7	4.6	.9	3.0	.4	1.0	.1	2.5	.3
1992	3.0	.8	4.7	.7	3.6	.5	5.3	.5	3.5	1.9	4.2	.9	2.9	.5	1.0	.2	2.5	.4
1993	2.9	.9	4.2	.8	3.3	.6	4.9	.6	3.3	2.0	4.3	1.1	2.8	.7	1.0	.2	2.3	.5
1994	2.8	1.0	3.9	.9	3.3	.6	4.9	.6	3.2	2.3	4.2	1.2	2.7	.7	.9	.2	2.2	.6
1995	2.5	1.1	3.4	.9	3.3	.6	4.2	.7	2.9	2.4	3.9	1.3	2.4	.8	.8	.2	2.0	.8
1996	2.2	1.1	3.0	1.0	2.5	.8	3.7	.8	2.5	2.4	3.8	1.3	2.1	.8	.7	.2	1.8	.7
1997	2.1	1.2	3.0	1.1	2.9	.8	3.6	.8	2.4	2.4	3.7	1.2	2.0	1.0	.7	.2	1.7	.8
Percent change, 1976–97	–36	500	–35	1,000	–48	300	–33	700	–45	500	–20	200	–29	([5])	0	([5])	–15	([5])
Percent change, 1988–97	–40	140	–43	175	–38	100	–45	100	–47	85	–20	140	–38	233	–22	100	-29	300

[1] Rates represent the number of injuries and illnesses per 100 full-time equivalent workers and were calculated as (*N*/EH) x 200,000, where

N = number of injuries and illnesses
EH = total hours worked by all employees during the calendar year
200,000 = base for 100 full-time equivalent workers (working 40 hours per week, 50 weeks per year).

[2] Data for 1976–78 are based on the 1972 edition of the *Standard Industrial Classification* [SIC] *Manual*; data for 1979–87 are based on the 1972 edition of the SIC *Manual* and the 1977 supplement thereto; and data for 1988–97 are based on the 1987 edition of the SIC *Manual*.

[3] In 1996, air courier operations previously classified in industry groups 421, 422, 423, 452, 473, and 478 were reclassified into industry group 451. As a result, the 1996 and 1997 estimates for these SIC's and major industry groups 42, 45, and 47 are not comparable to those for previous years. In addition, the 1996 and 1997 estimates for transportation and public utilities may have more variability than those for previous years.

[4] To maintain comparability with the rest of the series, data for small nonfarm employers in low-risk industries who were not surveyed were imputed and included in the survey estimates.

[5] Not applicable where base is 0.0.

workers in 1997, the rate for establishments with 250 to 999 employees was 10 times that number, at 2 cases per 100 workers. In contrast to restricted-activity cases, the establishment size profile for the rate for days-away-from-work cases has been described as an inverted *U*. Medium-sized establishments (50 to 249 employees) report higher rates of days-away-from-work cases than do small and large establishments. However, between 1986 and 1997, the days-away-from-work-case rate declined less at the upper end of the size distribution than in the 50–249 size class. Thus, there is now a more modest decline in the days-away-from-work-case rate as the establishment size increases.

Between 1986 and 1997, the larger classes of establishment experienced the greatest increases in rates of restricted-

Table 2. Fifteen two-digit SIC industries with the largest increases in restricted-activity-case rates, 1986–97 (rates per 100 full-time equivalent workers)

Industry	SIC code	Restricted-activity-case rate			Days-away-from-work-case rate		
		1986	1997	Change	1986	1997	Change
Food and kindred products	20	1.1	4.8	3.7	6.9	3.2	–3.7
Transportation equipment	37	.8	3.8	3.0	3.4	2.8	–.6
Primary metal industries	33	.9	3.5	2.6	5.2	3.7	–1.5
Furniture and fixtures	25	.9	3.0	2.1	5.3	2.8	–2.5
Rubber and miscellaneous products	30	1.0	3.1	2.1	5.6	2.7	–2.9
Fabricated metal products	34	.9	2.8	1.9	5.9	3.6	–2.3
Lumber and wood products	24	.7	2.6	1.9	9.0	3.9	–5.1
Stone, clay, and glass products	32	.7	2.5	1.8	5.8	3.3	–2.5
General merchandise stores	53	.3	2.0	1.7	3.9	2.6	–1.3
Building materials and garden supplies	52	.3	1.8	1.5	4.3	3.0	–1.3
Miscellaneous manufacturing industries	39	.5	2.0	1.5	3.8	2.2	–1.6
Textile mill products	22	.6	2.1	1.5	2.4	1.0	–1.4
Leather and leather products	31	.6	2.1	1.5	4.2	2.2	–2.0
Apparel and other textile products	23	.2	1.6	1.4	2.5	1.5	–1.0
Hotels and other lodging places	70	.3	1.5	1.2	4.0	2.3	–1.7

NOTE: Table excludes SIC 45, whose rate change may have been influenced by the reclassification of air courier operations in 1996.

work-activity-only cases. The rate rose most in establishments with 250 to 999 employees, an increase of 1.5 cases per 100 full-time equivalent workers, followed closely by establishments with 1,000 or more employees, whose rate increased by 1.4 cases. More-than-offsetting declines in rates of days-away-from-work cases occurred in establishments with 50 to 249 employees and those with 250 to 999 employees, so that the rates of lost-workday cases for these categories decreased.

With the rate of restricted-activity cases rising in all sectors of the economy—particularly in manufacturing and in larger establishments—the question that comes to mind is whether these trends are related, because manufacturing establishments tend to be larger than those in other industries. This turns out not to be the case; an examination of the establishment size data by major industry division (not presented herein) shows that, within many of the industry divisions, the increases in the restricted-activity-case rates were greater in larger establishments (though not necessarily the largest in the largest size class). That is, accounting crudely for industry composition does not eliminate the differential rise in restricted-activity-case rates across establishments of different size.

Case and demographic data, 1992–96

The injury and illness data that the Bureau has collected since 1972 provide considerable detail along the dimensions of industry and establishment size. However, the data do not tell us anything about the nature of the injury and illness cases or about the workers who experience occupational injuries or illnesses. To address the demand for this information, since 1992 the Bureau has collected a substantial body of additional information, termed "case and demographic data," on injury and illness cases involving days away from work. Because no such data are collected for cases that involve only restricted work activity, there is no additional information about these increasingly numerous cases.

The case and demographic data on days-away-from-work cases do contain interesting information about the increasing use of restricted workdays. As mentioned previously, cases involving days away from work may also involve some days of restricted work activity. While the latter are not routinely tabulated, the BLS survey does maintain a count of the number of restricted-activity days for each sampled days-away-from-work case.

Even over the relatively brief period from 1992 to 1996, the survey reveals a slight shortening in the duration of days away from work, and a growing use of restricted-activity days, in cases that have days away from work. While the median number of days away from work was 6 in 1992 and 1993, it fell to 5 in later years. Further, the distribution of days-away-from-work cases has shifted toward those with shorter duration. (See table 4.) In 1992, 15.7 percent of days-away-from-work cases lasted only 1 day. The percentage increased to 16.9 percent in 1995, before dropping slightly to 16.7 percent in 1996. In contrast, 19.7 percent of days-away-from-work cases lasted 31 or more days in 1992, a percentage that dropped to 17.9 percent in 1995 before rising to 18.5 percent in 1996. The percentages of cases of intermediate duration showed little change over the period, perhaps reflecting the fact that some cases that previously were of longer duration moved into the intermediate-duration categories, while some cases moved into shorter duration categories.

The decline in the number of days away from work and the shifting duration distributions are relatively modest. More striking is the growing fraction of days-away-from-work

cases that are accompanied by restricted-activity days. In 1992, 16.8 percent of days-away-from-work cases also had some number of restricted-activity days. (See table 5.) By 1996, the percentage had risen to 25.8, an increase of more than 50 percent. As the table shows, restricted-activity days became more prevalent in all categories of duration, with no obvious relationship between the increase and the duration. The largest increase in the prevalence of restricted activity (10.9 percentage points) occurred for cases lasting 6 to 10 days away from work, while the smallest increase (7.3 percentage points) occurred for the most severe category of cases, 31 or more days away from work.

The use of restricted-activity days in conjunction with days away from work grew in all industrial sectors from 1992 through 1996, although the amount of increase varied. (See table 6.) Consistent with the fact that manufacturing had the highest rate of cases of restricted activity only, establishments in manufacturing were most likely to report days-away-from-work cases accompanied by restricted-activity days. However, mining, rather than manufacturing, showed the largest increase in the percentage of days-away-from-work cases with positive restricted activity days (10.4 percentage points), while construction showed the largest rate of growth (78 percent). At the other end of the spectrum, the finance, insurance, and real estate sector had the smallest increase.

In a similar manner, consistent with the fact that larger establishments had higher rates of restricted-work-activity-only cases than did smaller establishments, larger establishments were more likely to report restricted-activity days accompanying days-away-from-work cases. (See table 7.) In 1996, 21.9 percent of days-away-from-work cases were accompanied by restricted-activity days in establishments with 11 to 49 employees. The percentage increased with the size of the establishment, to 32.3 percent in establishments with 1,000 or more employees. Interestingly, the smallest establishments (1–10 employees) were more likely to report restricted-activity days than were establishments in the next largest size class.

In general, between 1992 and 1996, larger establishments also experienced faster increases in the percentage of days-away-from-work cases accompanied by restricted-activity days. Measured by either change in percent or rate of change, establishments with 250 to 999 employees experienced the fastest growth, while those with 1 to 10 employees had the slowest growth. However, restricted-activity days did not grow as much in the largest establishments (1,000 or more employees) as in those with 250 to 999 employees.

For days-away-from-work cases, the case and demographic data collected since 1992 shed more light on the types of injuries and illnesses that have declined. Unfortunately, because no such data are collected for restricted-activity-only cases, it is not possible to identify the types of injuries and illnesses that are growing fastest in that category.

Table 8 reports the rates of days-away-from-work cases for eight kinds of injury or illness with the highest rates in 1992. These annual rates are expressed in terms of cases per 10,000 full-time equivalent workers. The table shows that rates declined for all eight kinds of injury and illness listed. The rate for the dominant category, sprains and strains, fell from 133.7 in 1992 to 97.6 in 1996, or 27 percent. In terms of percent change of the rate, dislocations declined the most, while carpal tunnel syndrome declined the least.

Whereas the rate of days-away-from-work cases dropped for all eight injury and illness categories listed in the table, the percentage of those cases with restricted-activity days increased in all eight categories. (See table 9.) At both the beginning and end of the period, persons taking days away from work because of carpal tunnel syndrome were most likely to include some days with restricted work activity. For this kind of injury, the fraction of days-away-from-work cases with restricted-activity days increased 16.3 percentage points, from 30.6 percent to 46.9 percent, the largest percentage-point increase shown in the table. However, the three injury and illness categories with the lowest incidences of restricted-activity days in 1992 (heat burns and scalds, punctures, and bruises and contusions) showed the highest rates of growth of restricted-activity days up to 1996.

Table 3. **Change in occupational injury and illness rates, by size of establishment, 1986–97 (rate per 100 full-time equivalent workers)**

Number of employees	Lost-workday-case rate			Days-away-from-work-case rate			Restricted-work-case rate		
	1986	1997	Change	1986	1997	Change	1986	1997	Change
All establishments	3.6	3.3	–0.3	3.3	2.1	–1.2	0.3	1.2	0.9
1–10	1.5	1.3	–.2	1.4	1.1	–.3	.1	.2	.1
11–49	2.0	2.5	.5	1.9	2.0	.1	.1	.5	.4
50–249	4.7	4.0	–.7	4.4	2.6	–1.8	.3	1.4	1.1
250–999	4.5	4.3	–.2	3.9	2.3	–1.6	.5	2.0	1.5
1,000 or more	3.3	4.0	.7	2.7	2.0	–.7	.5	1.9	1.4

Table 4. Distribution of days-away-from-work cases, by number of days away from work, 1992–96

Number of days away from work	Percentage					Change, 1992–96
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	…
1	15.7	16.3	16.3	16.9	16.7	1.0
2	12.9	13.0	12.9	13.4	13.1	.2
3–5	20.4	20.7	21.0	20.9	20.6	.2
6–10	13.6	13.4	13.3	13.4	13.2	–.4
11–20	11.4	11.4	11.2	11.3	11.7	.3
21–30	6.4	6.3	6.4	6.2	6.2	–.2
31 or more	19.7	19.0	18.9	17.9	18.5	–1.2

Table 5. Percentage of days-away-from-work cases with reported days of restricted work activity, by number of days away from work, 1992–96

Number of days away from work	Percentage					Change, 1992–96	Rate of change (percent), 1992–96
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996		
Total	16.8	19.1	21.1	23.8	25.8	9.0	53.6
1	15.4	17.3	19.3	22.2	23.5	8.1	52.6
2	14.9	17.3	19.5	22.2	24.2	9.3	62.4
3–5	16.0	17.8	20.1	23.2	25.1	9.1	56.9
6–10	16.7	19.3	21.5	24.5	27.6	10.9	65.3
11–20	18.8	21.8	23.5	25.7	28.8	10.0	53.2
21–30	18.9	22.1	25.2	26.8	29.7	10.8	57.1
31 or more	18.1	20.3	21.7	24.2	25.4	7.3	40.3

Possible contributing factors

What accounts for the trend toward restricted-activity workdays that is observed in the data? Little rigorous empirical evidence addresses this issue, but some factors may play a role.[2] First, in the mid-1980s, OSHA imposed sizable fines on certain large manufacturing companies for recordkeeping violations.[3] Among the industries affected were chemicals, food and kindred products, and automotive products. Large establishments in these industries reported increases in days-away-from-work and restricted-activity cases during the period following the fines. Thus, some of the increase in restricted-work-activity-only cases may have arisen out of increased recognition that these cases are required to be reported.

However, the rise in restricted-activity cases has continued long past the time of these large fines, so other causes must be sought. An important development in the 1980s was a rapid rise in the costs of workers' compensation insurance for workplace injuries and illnesses. Many State legislatures, which are responsible for the laws governing workers' compensation, reacted to this development by passing a variety of legislative measures designed to control the cost increase. Some of these measures—mandatory employer safety and health programs, premium discounts for high-quality programs of that nature, and medical deductibles payable by the employer, for example—might have resulted in employers paying more attention to workplace safety.[4] At the same time, rising workers' compensation costs themselves may have altered employers' views about the cost of safety, leading them to view safety as a controllable, rather than an uncontrollable, cost. These two factors may have led employers to invest more in safety, reducing both the frequency and severity of injuries. The decline in overall rates and the shifting of injuries away from days away from work and toward restricted-activity days would be consistent with this hypothesis.

State laws might also be responsible for the more rapid return to work of injured workers. Legislative changes in many States now permit the use of managed health care, which might lead to greater scrutiny of individuals' health-related claims. Some States even have passed "return-to-work" legislation. These laws differ by State, but include features such as financial incentives to employers for encouraging workers to return early to work, punishment of employers for failing to allow

Table 6. Percentage of days-away-from-work cases with reported days of restricted work activity, by major industry group, 1992–96

Industry	Percentage					Change, 1992–96	Rate of change (percent), 1992–96
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996		
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	14.0	16.4	18.1	21.5	23.7	9.7	69.3
Mining	21.3	21.5	23.5	22.2	31.7	10.4	48.8
Construction	10.5	12.7	13.7	16.3	18.7	8.2	78.1
Manufacturing	22.5	24.5	26.9	29.4	32.3	9.8	43.6
Transportation and public utilities	13.0	16.0	16.0	20.1	20.5	7.5	57.7
Trade	15.2	17.7	20.8	22.2	25.3	10.1	66.4
Finance, insurance, and real estate	15.9	18.4	20.4	21.0	21.3	5.4	34.0
Services	16.4	18.6	20.5	24.3	25.6	9.2	56.1

Table 7. Percentage of days-away-from-work cases with reported days of restricted work activity, by size of establishment, 1992–96

Number of employees in establishment	Percentage					Change, 1992–96	Rate of change (percent), 1992–96
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996		
All sizes	16.8	19.1	21.1	23.8	25.8	9.0	53.6
1–10	17.6	19.1	19.2	19.6	24.4	6.8	38.6
11–49	14.8	16.8	18.1	21.2	21.9	7.1	48.0
50–249	14.9	17.5	20.0	22.2	24.1	9.2	61.7
250–999	18.2	21.1	23.9	26.9	30.4	12.2	67.0
1,000 or more	22.3	24.7	26.7	30.7	32.3	10.0	44.8

Table 8. Incidence of days-away-from-work cases, by nature of injury or illness, 1992–96

Nature of injury or illness	Rate per 10,000 full-time equivalent workers					Change, 1992–96	Rate of change (percent), 1992–96
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996		
Sprains and strains	133.7	121.6	119.3	107.5	97.6	–36.1	–27.0
Bruises and contusions	29.1	26.8	26.2	23.6	20.8	–8.3	–28.5
Cuts and lacerations	22.7	21.5	20.4	18.8	15.8	–6.9	–30.4
Fractures	18.8	17.3	17.2	15.3	14.3	–4.5	–23.9
Heat burns and scalds	5.4	4.8	4.6	4.4	3.5	–1.9	–35.2
Carpal tunnel syndrome	4.3	5.2	4.8	3.9	3.6	–.7	–16.3
Dislocations	4.3	4.0	3.5	2.6	2.3	–2.0	–46.5
Punctures	4.1	4.1	3.2	3.0	2.8	–1.3	–31.7

injured employees back to work, and punishment of employees for refusing appropriate work. One article mentions a rapid rise in the growth of firms that provide advice to employers on job modifications that enable injured workers to return to work earlier.[5]

One example of an apparently successful return-to-work effort is Oregon's Employer-at-Injury Program. Started in 1993, this program provides incentives to employers to bring injured workers back to work earlier and to put them on "light-duty" jobs within the limitations of their injury or illness. The incentives include wage subsidies (50 percent of wages up to 3 months), reimbursements of up to $2,500 for modifications to the workplace to accommodate injured workers, $1,000 for tools and equipment required for the job, and $400 for work-related clothing. As of 1997, 16 percent of all disabling claims (cases involving more than 3 days away from work) and 6 percent of nondisabling claims availed themselves of the program. Nearly 95 percent of program costs were for wage subsidies.[6] An Oregon researcher has hypothesized that the Employer-at-Injury Program may have helped reduce the number of injuries that are classified as disabling (moving them into the nondisabling category) and may be partly responsible for the decline in the rate of disabling claims that has been observed in Oregon in recent years.[7]

Only time will tell whether restricted-work-activity cases will continue to increase in prevalence among workplace injuries and illnesses. However, it is clear from the BLS data that over the past decade these cases have already risen to prominence and merit increased attention and research. □

Table 9. Percentage of days-away-from-work cases with reported days of restricted work activity , by nature of injury or illness, 1992–96

Nature of injury or illness	Percentage					Change, 1992–96	Rate of change (percent), 1992–96
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996		
Sprains and strains	19.1	21.7	24.1	27.2	29.0	9.9	51.8
Bruises and contusions	11.9	14.0	15.4	18.2	20.2	8.3	69.7
Cuts and lacerations	13.1	14.4	17.2	18.3	21.9	8.8	67.2
Fractures	19.4	22.3	25.2	28.6	28.3	8.9	45.9
Heat burns and scalds	10.5	10.1	13.6	13.8	18.9	8.4	80.0
Carpal tunnel syndrome	30.6	31.9	35.1	38.2	46.9	16.3	53.3
Dislocations	22.3	29.5	25.1	26.0	29.8	7.5	33.6
Punctures	9.7	11.4	11.8	14.4	16.5	6.8	70.1

Notes

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[1] SIC 45 was excluded from the table because the change in its restricted-activity case rate may have been influenced by the reclassification of air courier operations. (See footnote 4 of table 1.)

[2] One rigorous study finds that employers are more likely to present workers with the option of using restricted-activity days in States where workers' compensation income benefits are more generous. (See Geetha M. Waehrer and Ted Miller, *Restricted Work, Workers' Compensation and Days Away from Work*, mimeograph, December 1998.

[3] *Twenty Years of OSHA Federal Employment Data* (U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, January 1993).

[4] Hugh Conway and Jens Svenson, "Occupational injury and illness rates, 1992–96: why they fell," *Monthly Labor Review*, November 1998, pp. 36–58.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[6] *The Employer-at-Injury Program, 1996–1997* (Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services, Workers' Compensation Division, July 1998).

[7] Alicia Matter, *Comparison of Workers' Compensation Claims to Oregon Injury and Illness Survey Cases, 1996* (Oregon Deparment of Consumer and Business Services, May 1998); available on the Internet at **http://www.cbs.state.or.us/external/imd/rasums/3198/7_3198r.html**.