

Issues



U.S. Department of Labor
Bureau of Labor Statistics

in Labor Statistics

Deadly Highway Accidents Outnumber Other Fatal Work Incidents

Highway travel claims more lives than any other work-related activity. In 1995, approximately 1,300 workers died in highway traffic incidents, compared to 1,000 work-related homicides and about 550 deaths each, due to workers being struck by objects or falling from heights. Of the 6,210 fatalities documented in the 1995 BLS Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, highway incidents accounted for a fifth of the total. Homicides numbered a sixth of the fatalities, but no other deadly circumstance made up more than a tenth of the 1995 total.¹ (This report also describes nonfatal highway incidents.)

Although truckdrivers outnumbered, by far, any other occupation involved in highway fatalities, most victims of fatal work-related highway accidents did not operate trucks or other motor vehicles for a living. Rather, these casualties routinely drove, or rode, to various locations to perform work activities. They included various types of workers: Nurses caring for the infirm in their homes, sales representatives visiting prospective buyers and/or current clients, managers and administrators attending meetings and/or monitoring job sites, protective service workers responding to fires or other emergencies or investigating crimes, and farm-workers driving tractors on public

roadways to travel to fields. Based on the BLS fatality census, truckdrivers (and others operating motor vehicles as a profession) made up about two-fifths of all highway fatalities, while other types of workers accounted for three-fifths of the total.

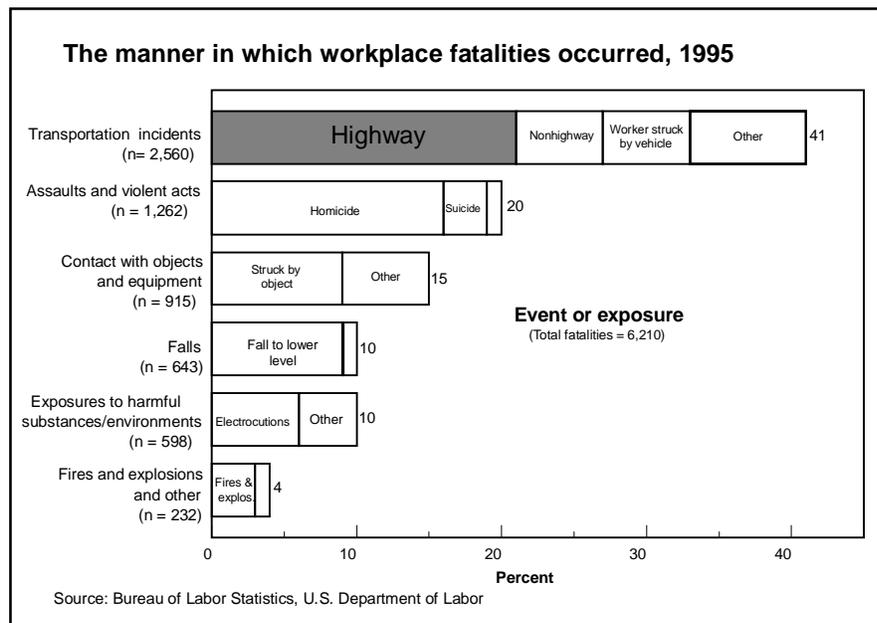
Three types of incidents accounted for a fifth each of all job-related highway fatalities: Head-on collisions between two or more vehicles; single-vehicle crashes into stationary objects at the side of the road, such as trees, utility poles, and bridge abutments; and noncollision incidents involving overturned or jack-knifed vehicles. (See table.) Half the 1,329 workers killed in 1995 highway vehicle incidents were driving (or riding) in trucks—most often tractor trailer rigs, and to a lesser extent, pickup trucks—while another quarter were killed in automobiles. Nearly 90 percent of the workers involved in highway fatalities had been operating vehicles at the time of accident; the rest were passengers.

Nonfatal highway incidents

Besides 1,300 highway fatalities, BLS recently began compiling data on the number of nonfatal highway incidents in private workplaces that necessitate injured wage and salary workers to miss a day or more of work. For 1994 (the latest year for which such data are available), BLS estimated 51,000 injuries from highway incidents resulting in lost worktime. These injuries caused workers to miss a median of 10 workdays—twice the national median for the 2-1/4 million injuries relating to all types of workplace incidents in 1994 that resulted in days away from work. This severity pattern was also evident for specific occupations. For example, injuries to truckdrivers involved in highway incidents (17,000 cases) entailed a median of 14-days of lost worktime, compared to an 8-day median for all truckdriver injuries (164,000 cases in 1994).

Although nonfatal and fatal highway

¹See chart for distribution of workplace fatalities among six broad event or exposure categories. The chart also depicts sub-categories within the major categories. For example, the sub-category "Highway" is designated within the event marked "Transportation incidents." Highway fatalities include deaths of vehicle occupants, primarily drivers, while on public roadways, shoulders, or surrounding areas. Fatalities that occur during commutes to or from work, however, are excluded.



Fatal and disabling injuries resulting from highway accidents, 1994-95

Type of highway accident	Percent distribution		Median ³ workdays lost from disabling injuries ²
	Fatal injuries ¹ (n=1,329)	Disabling injuries ² (n=50,800)	
All highway accidents	100	100	10
Collision between vehicles, mobile equipment	48	71	10
Moving in opposite directions	18	4	11
Moving in intersection	7	10	8
Moving in same direction	9	16	8
Moving and standing vehicle, mobile equipment	3	12	7
In roadway	2	11	7
Side of road	1	1	10
Unspecified	7	23	14
Vehicle struck stationary object or equipment (except another vehicle)	20	7	8
In roadway	1	2	5
Side of road	19	5	12
Noncollision incident	26	14	12
Jack-knifed or overturned	20	6	14
Ran off highway	4	3	13
Sudden start or stop	1	2	10
Other or unspecified	6	9	—

¹ Based on data from the 1995 BLS Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, which covered all workers in the private and public sectors: Wage and salaried, self-employed, and family members.

² Based on data from the 1994 BLS Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, which covered just wage and salaried workers in private industries. Disabling highway incidents are those that result in lost worktime.

³ Median work days lost is the point at which half the injuries involved more lost days and half involved fewer days. The dash indicates that a median was not computed.

NOTE: Percentages may not add to overall or category totals, due to omission of miscellaneous categories and/or because of rounding.

accidents usually resulted from vehicles colliding, the way these collisions occurred accounted for differences in injury severity. Collisions between vehicles moving in the same direction were generally cited for lost worktime injuries, while fatal crashes typically

involved vehicles moving in opposite (oncoming) directions. Additionally, highway accidents involving moving vehicles colliding into standing vehicles (either parked or in traffic) were cited more often for lost worktime than for fatal injuries. By contrast, single-vehicle

crashes and jack-knifed or overturned vehicles figured more prominently in highway fatalities than in lost worktime. (See table.)

In highway incidents resulting in injured survivors, the injuries usually effected relatively lengthy absences from work. Injuries from jackknifed or overturned vehicles caused a median of 14 lost workdays; injuries due to vehicles striking fixed objects along roadsides recorded a 12-day median; and injuries caused by head-on collisions had an 11-day median. Additionally, those incidents involving out-of-control vehicles running off highways resulted in a median of 13 lost workdays.

Data for this report were derived from the BLS Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries and its companion Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses. For more information on highway incidents, contact the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Safety, Health and Working Conditions, Room 3180, 2 Massachusetts Avenue, NE, Washington DC 20212. Telephone: (202) 606-6175.

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