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Oregon announces 2007 workplace deaths Numbers drop to third-lowest in state history

(Salem) – Thirty-five people covered by Oregon’s workers’ compensation system died on the job during 2007, according to data compiled by the Department of Consumer and Business Services (DCBS).

The 2007 total marks the third-lowest number of compensable workplace deaths in the state’s history. In 2005, there were 31 deaths, which is the lowest number reported since the state started tracking workplace deaths in 1943. There was an average of 55 workplace deaths per year in Oregon in the 1990s and 81 per year in the 1980s.

“Because of the hard work and cooperation among Oregon’s employers and employees, we have made great progress in recent decades in reducing deaths as well as workplace injuries and illnesses,” said Cory Streisinger, DCBS director. “But, as the numbers show, not every Oregonian gets to come home to their family safely at the end of their shift – which means we all must continue to focus on safety each and every day.”

The largest concentration of deaths occurred in construction (12 deaths), with the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector seeing the second highest numbers (five deaths). Nearly 29 percent of the total accidents were the result of falls.

“Construction continues to be very dangerous,” said Michael Wood, Oregon OSHA administrator. “We need to reduce those risks, particularly those that lead to falls, because we know how to prevent them.”

Oregon OSHA currently offers educational workshops, consultation services, training videos and Web site information to help Oregon employers create or improve their safety and health programs.

DCBS compiles fatality statistics from records of death claim benefits paid by Oregon workers’ compensation insurers during the calendar year. The data reported may exclude workplace fatalities involving self-employed individuals, city of Portland police and fire employees, federal employees, and incidents occurring in Oregon to individuals with out of state employers. These workers are either not subject to Oregon workers’ compensation coverage requirements or are covered by other compensation systems.

Deaths that occur during a prior calendar year may appear in the compensable fatality count for a later year because of the time required to process a claim. Complete data on all deaths caused by injuries in Oregon workplaces, regardless of whether they are covered by workers' compensation insurance are computed separately and reported in the annual Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) administered by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The 2007 CFOI report is not expected for release until the fall of 2008.

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Oregon OSHA, a division of the Department of Consumer & Business Services, enforces the state's workplace safety and health rules and works to improve workplace safety and health for all Oregon workers. For more information, go to www.orosha.org. The Department of Consumer and Business Services is Oregon's largest business regulatory and consumer protection agency. For more information, visit www.dcbs.oregon.gov.