

Issues



Workplaces in Labor Statistics

U.S. Department of Labor
Bureau of Labor Statistics

Safer Construction Workplaces Evident During the Early 1990s

Construction workers build our Nation's highways and homes, erect its workplaces, and keep these structures in good repair. In the process, these workers traditionally have faced a much higher risk of serious injury than workers on factory floors and at other work sites. Since the early 1970s, the construction industry's incidence of injuries and illnesses resulting in lost work time typically has exceeded the national rates by a wide margin—usually by more than 60 percent.

But construction's safety picture appears to have improved somewhat in the early 1990s, even though many of the industry's potentially dangerous working conditions (such as working at elevations, in uncertain weather, and under time constraints) still lurk. The accompanying chart shows a decline in the construction industry's rate of injuries and illnesses serious enough to require workers to either take time off or to lighten or restrict their workload for each of the years 1991-93. Its 1992 and 1993 rates (respectively, 5.8 and 5.5 per 100 equivalent full-time workers), in fact, were the lowest on record for the industry since the mid-1970s. Moreover, the sheer size of the 1991-93 rate declines helped narrow the persistent gap in serious injury and illness rates between it and the private sector as a whole. In 1990, the lost workday case rate in construction (6.7 per 100 workers) was 63 percent higher than the national rate (4.1 per 100 workers). In 1993, the corresponding rate gap was 45 percent higher (a construction rate of 5.5

compared with a 3.8 rate nationally), the smallest spread between the two ever recorded by BLS.

And in 1993, the rate gap nearly closed between construction and certain other hazardous industries. That year, the frequency of lost workday injuries and illnesses in construction (5.5 per 100 workers) differed little from the rate in manufacturing (5.3) or the rate in transportation and public utilities (5.4).

In the construction industry, injury rates and hours of work usually move in the same direction in a given year. But between 1992 and 1993, hours of work rose by 5.5 percent while the number of lost workdays cases remained about the same.

Injury and illness characteristics

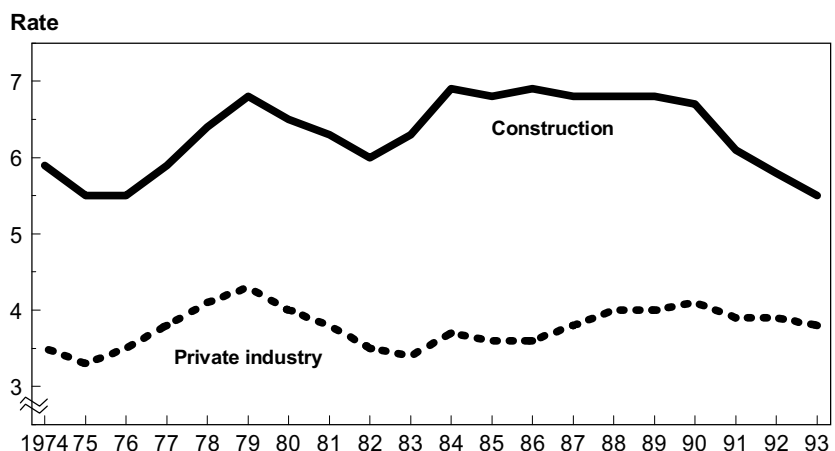
BLS recently began surveying the "who and how" of cases involving days

away from work in the construction industry and the number of days lost. In 1992, nearly 210,000 such incidents were reported, half of them requiring at least 7 days away from work to recuperate. (Because of limited resources, the characteristics of another 21,000 construction cases involving just restricted work activity were not studied in more detail.)

The accompanying table shows the most common disabling conditions sustained by construction workers and the leading ways in which these injuries and illnesses involving days away from work happened.

Serious "sprains and strains" was, by far, the principal physical characteristic of construction workers seriously injured, accounting for nearly two-fifths of the 210,000 cases reported in 1992. Such sprains commonly affected the back.

Injuries and illnesses involving lost worktime per 100 full-time workers in construction and all private industries, 1974-93



SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Surveys of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses

Injuries and illnesses in construction industries resulting in days away from work, selected characteristics, 1992

Disabling condition	Percent of total	Disabling event	Percent of total
All cases	100	All cases	100
Sprains, strains	38	Overexertion	23
Fractures	10	Struck by object	18
Cuts, lacerations	9	Fall to lower level	12
Bruises, contusions	8	Struck against object	8
Multiple injuries	3	Fall on same level	6
All other conditions	32	All other events	33

“Fractures,” “cuts, lacerations,” and “bruises, contusions” together composed another fourth of that case total.

Overexertion from lifting, pulling, or pushing heavy or unwieldy objects was the leading way in which disabling injury or illness occurred; such a disabling event was mentioned in nearly a fourth of the 1992 construction cases.

Next in frequency was being struck by an object, followed by falls to a lower level. Given the nature of the industry, falls from elevations were a much larger share of that industry’s case total (12 percent) than their share of all private industry cases (5 percent).

For more information on nonfatal incidents in construction and other

private industries covered by the Bureau’s Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, contact the Office of Safety, Health and Working Conditions, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2 Massachusetts Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20212-0001. Telephone (202) 606-6180.

Information on fatal work incidents is available from the Bureau’s Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, first conducted nationally in 1992. These data may be obtained from the same office. Telephone (202) 606-6175.

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