

Occupational Health

Every working day more than three million Washington State citizens work for one of Washington's 160,000 employers. On average, one Washington worker will die every three workdays from an occupational injury. Every hour, 100 Washington workers suffer an occupational injury or illness. Workplace illness and injury has very significant direct and indirect costs, to workers, employers, and society at large.

Section Overview

Washington workers face physical and chemical exposures in the workplace that can cause injury or illness. Occupational injuries are a result of exposure to physical hazards in the workplace.

Hazard reduction occurs at several levels. The best strategies remove the hazard from the workplace. Another strategy engineers out the hazard with protections that are outside the workers' control and are always in place. Administrative controls, like managing workers for safety and job rotation can also decrease hazardous exposures. The least effective hazard control method uses personal protective equipment. This method does not remove hazards but only protects workers from direct exposure to the hazard.

Each injury represents a condition that has a significant impact on the health of Washington workers. Researchers at the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries occupational health program actively track occupational injuries. Injury prevention programs focus on improving workplace safety systems, engineering, and administrative controls to reduce hazards and occupational injuries.

This section includes chapters on

- [Fatal Occupational Injuries](#)
- [Non-fatal Occupational Injury](#)

Highlights and Discussion

Workplace fatalities are the most extreme form of occupational injury. They are preventable. Creating systems to identify and prioritize workplace hazards and implementing injury control measures are proven strategies to reduce the number of injuries and deaths.

Non-fatal occupational injuries are a major concern in occupational health. Seven categories of occupational injury account for 90% of all lost-time injuries, over 90% of the resulting lost workdays, and 90% of total workers' compensation costs. Work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs) of the upper extremity, neck, and back account for more than 40% of all accepted lost-time workers' compensation claims in Washington. WMSDs are costly and preventable. Early reporting of symptoms and prompt treatment can reduce disability associated with WMSDs.

Other common types of injuries include falls from elevation, falls on the same level, motor vehicle crashes, lower extremity musculoskeletal disorders, and injuries from being caught in or struck by objects.

The risk of injury varies across industry sectors. Construction and transportation have the highest numbers and incidence rates of injuries. But high-risk jobs exist in other industries.

Disparities

Changes in the workplace have made it difficult to assess disparities in occupational risks. The U. S. economy has shifted from manufacturing to services, and workers no longer have a single lifetime employer. Today, many people work longer hours, hold multiple jobs, do shift work, work from home, have reduced job security, and perform part-time or temporary work. In addition, traditional occupational health research often has not included groups that make up a growing proportion of the workforce including people older than 65 and younger than 18, women, contingent workers, and workers who are members of minority groups.