In the News: Vehicle Towing Industry Injury & Fatality Rate Higher Than Other Emergency Responders

A NIOSH study has found a high rate of work-related injury and death in the motor vehicle towing industry. Workers in this field may assist individuals in emergency situations that present risks to the worker, such as traffic incidents requiring work on the side of highways or busy roads. Historically, studies have focused on the safety of other types of first responders, such as fire-fighters, police or emergency medical personnel; NIOSH investigators aimed to address this research gap using data from Bureau of Labor Statistics' Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, and Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries.

From 2011 through 2016, 6,400 nonfatal injuries and ill- nesses occurred in the motor vehicle towing industry. The rate for this industry was 204 per 10,000 full-time employees, which is more than double the rate of 98 per 10,000 full-time employees for all U.S. private industries. The leading causes of injury was contact with objects and equipment, overexertion and bodily reaction from bending, kneeling, crawling or reaching. Most injuries involved sprains, strains and tears.

During the same period, 191 deaths occurred in the motor vehicle towing industry. According to researchers, this translates to 43 deaths per 100,000 workers, which is more than 15 times the rate of 2.8 workers per 100,000 workers for all U.S. private industries. The leading cause of death was motor vehicle incidents (commonly involving workers on the side of the road being struck by passing vehicles) and contact with objects and equipment.

NIOSH investigators note that nonfatal injuries and deaths in the motor vehicle towing industry have been largely overlooked. They say the findings from this study underscore the need for additional research and tailored prevention efforts.

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