Injury / Illness: Fatality Report



INCIDENT

A man died after being hospitalized with a back injury from a construction incident, although he died from an unrelated cause. Alejandro Becerra, 53, a framer, died from complications relating to pre-existing conditions.

More than a week earlier, Becerra had been helping to erect a commercial building when the construction incident occurred. An eight-foot-tall wall frame tipped over, injuring four workers. Three of the four suffered mostly cuts and scrapes, but Becerra was taken to hospital with a broken back. After a few days he was transferred to a regional medical center, where he died.

Sheriffs said he apparently died from diabetes and a heart condition.

It’s a sad truth that illnesses and general ill-health kill more workers than industrial accidents. Avoiding or reversing the progress of these conditions may be as simple as changing your diet and exercise habits.

For those of us with chronic conditions, talking to medical professionals and following their advice is usually the best course of action. Many chronic conditions can be managed successfully.

NEED TO KNOW

An *injury and illness prevention program,*[1] is a proactive process to help employers find and fix workplace hazards before workers are hurt. We know these programs can be effective at reducing injuries, illnesses, and fatalities. Many workplaces have already adopted such approaches, for example as part of OSHA’s cooperative programs. Not only do these employers experience dramatic decreases in workplace injuries, but they often report a transformed workplace culture that can lead to higher productivity and quality, reduced turnover, reduced costs, and greater employee satisfaction.

Thirty-four states and many nations around the world already require or encourage employers to implement such programs. The key elements common to all of these programs are management leadership, worker participation, hazard identification and assessment, hazard prevention and control, education and training, and program evaluation and improvement.

Based on the positive experience of employers with existing programs, OSHA believes that injury and illness prevention programs provide the foundation for breakthrough changes in the way employers identify and control hazards, leading to a significantly improved workplace health and safety environment. Adoption of an injury and illness prevention program will result in workers suffering fewer injuries, illnesses and fatalities. In addition, employers will improve their compliance with existing regulations, and will experience many of the financial benefits of a safer and healthier workplace cited in published studies and reports by individual companies, including significant reductions in workers' compensation premiums.

Fortunately, over the years, injuries and fatalities in the workplace have decreased substantially. Unfortunately, there are many workplace injuries and fatalities that continue to occur every day. OSHA reports that there is an average of 12 work-related fatalities throughout the United States every day.

BUSINESS / REGULATION

Every California employer around the State is required by Cal/OSHA to establish, implement and maintain a written Injury and Illness Prevention Program (IIPP). This written plan must describe your workplace's health and safety program and how you will implement the following eight elements that are required by the Cal/OSHA standard:

- Assignment of the responsibility for safety
- Assessment of workplace hazards
- Investigation of accidents, occupational injuries and occupational illnesses
- Correction of hazards
- Communication with employees and methods for involving them in safety-related activities
- Occupational safety and health training
- Systems for ensuring employee compliance with safety procedures
- Recordkeeping and documentation of your program and program activities.

Employers or businesses, or anyone who falls under the definition of a 'person conducting a business or undertaking' (a PCBU), has legal obligations under work health and safety laws.

A register of injuries must be kept for workers to record workplace injuries or illnesses.

The register of injuries may be kept in writing or be electronic (like on a computer).

Having a register that all workers can access will help them raise any safety issues they have. It can also help you develop new safe work procedures.

There are penalties for failing to keep a register of injuries.

What to include in your injury register?

The register of injuries must include:

- the name of the injured worker

- the worker’s address
- the worker’s age at the time of injury
- the worker’s occupation at the time of injury
- the industry in which the worker was engaged at the time of injury
- the time and date of injury
- the nature of the injury
- the cause of the injury.

Employers across the United States have implemented injury and illness prevention programs, and many jurisdictions, in the United States and abroad, currently require or encourage implementation of these programs. Currently, 34 U.S. states have established laws or regulations designed to require or encourage injury and illness prevention programs, including 15 states with mandatory regulations for all or some employers.5 Other states, while not requiring programs, have created financial incentives for employers to implement injury and illness prevention programs. In some instances, this involves providing – or facilitating – workers’ compensation insurance premium reductions for employers who establish programs meeting specified requirements. And 16 states, in all three of these groups, provide an array of voluntary guidance, consultation and training programs, and other assistance aimed at helping and encouraging employers to implement injury and illness prevention programs. Depending on the state, these programs apply to all employers, employers above or below a certain size threshold, employers with injury and illness rates above industry average, employers in “high-hazard” industries or employers with above-average workers’ compensation experience modification rates.

STATISTICS

In the four decades since the *Occupational Safety and Health Act* (OSH Act) was signed into law, workplace deaths and reported occupational injuries have dropped by more than 60 percent. Yet the nation’s workers continue to face an unacceptable number of work-related deaths, injuries and illnesses, most of them preventable:

- Every day, more than 12 workers die on the job – over 4,500 a year.
- Every year, more than 4.1 million workers suffer a serious job-related injury or illness.

Are American Workers in Danger? OSHA Reports Dramatic Increase in Fatal Occupational Injuries

The Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Census of 2016 Fatal Occupational Injuries reports there were 5,190 workplace fatalities in 2016, a seven percent increase from 2015, and notes that opioid-related deaths are on the rise in the workplace.

Fatal workplace injuries showed a dramatic uptick in 2016, rising by 7 percent over the number of workplace fatalities tallied in 2015. The fatal injury rate also increased from 3.4 per 100,000 full-time equivalent workers in 2015 to 3.6 in 2016.

More workers lost their lives in transportation incidents than any other event in 2016, accounting for about one out of every four fatal injuries. Workplace violence injuries increased by 23 percent, making it the second-most common

cause of workplace fatality. The Dec. 19 report also shows the number of overdoses on the job increased by 32 percent in 2016, and the number of drug-related fatalities has increased by at least 25 percent annually since 2012.

“Today’s occupational fatality data show a tragic trend with the third consecutive increase in worker fatalities in 2016 – the highest since 2008. America’s workers deserve better,” says Loren Sweatt, deputy assistant secretary for OSHA. “[OSHA] is committed to finding new and innovative ways of working with employers and employees to improve workplace safety and health. OSHA will work to address these trends through enforcement, compliance assistance, education and training and outreach.” In 2008, 5,214 workers lost their lives.

“The increase in job fatalities in 2016 reported by BLS shows that for many groups of workers in this country work is becoming more dangerous and deadly,” says Seminario.”The 5,190 workplace deaths from injuries means that 14 workers were killed on the job a day, the highest number since 2008 and the highest rate since 2010.”

“Federal OSHA now has fewer than 800 inspectors and can inspect workplaces on average only once every 159 years,” says Seminario, who points out that OSHA’s budget has declined since 2010 and been frozen for years.

The National Safety Council (NSC) released a statement indicating it “is very disheartened to see the latest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics showing a seven percent rise in workplace deaths since 2015. Fatal work injuries reached 5,190 in 2016 – the third consecutive annual increase and the first time in nearly a decade that the number has surpassed 5,000. Employers cannot ignore this data, particularly since many different demographics are affected.”

Of note, said NSC, were these numbers:

- Overdoses from the non-medical use of drugs or alcohol while on the job increased from 165 in 2015 to 217 in 2016, a 32 percent increase.
- Deaths among workers aged 55 or older totaled 1,848 – a 9.9 percent increase.
- Deaths among black or African-American, non-Hispanics increased 18.6 percent, totaling 587.
- Deaths among Asian, non-Hispanic workers increased 40.4 percent, totaling 160 deaths.
- Fall, slip and trip deaths increased 6 percent, totaling 849 deaths.
- Transportation incidents remained the most common fatal event, totaling 2,083 deaths.
- Unintentional workplace deaths increased 5 percent, totaling 4,399 deaths.
- Homicides increased 19.9 percent now totaling 500 deaths.

“ **Falls:** Approximately 36.5% of all deaths in the workplace occurred due to employees falling. These includes workers who have fallen due to unprotected sides or holes, improperly constructed walking or working surfaces, workers who have fallen off ladders, roofs, scaffolding, large skyscraper construction areas, etc., all due to failure to use proper fall protection. Incorporating the OSHA fall protection requirements would resolve these issues, which includes 1910.269(g)(2) Fall Protection.

- **Struck by an Object:**An estimated 10.1% of deaths occurred due to swinging, falling, or misplaced objects. These also include falling objects due to

rigging failure, lose or shifting materials, equipment malfunctions, and vehicle or equipment strikes.

- **Electrocutions:**About 8.6% of employees died due to electrocution. Workers face a number of electrocution risks on construction sites, such as exposed wiring, wet conditions while outlets are exposed, etc. These are caused by contact with overhead power lines or energized conductors or circuit parts in electrical panels and equipment panels, poorly maintained extension cords and power tools, as well as lightning strikes. Strict adherence to OSHA 1910.331-.335, 1910.269, and NFPA 70E *Standard for Electrical Safety in the Workplace* would prevent these accidents.
- **Caught-in or Caught-between:**Employees caught in or between machines, devices, or tools causing death accounted for about 2.5% of deaths. These also include trench or excavation collapses, as well as workers caught between moving or rotating equipment, or caught in collapsing structures or materials.

The 2017 OSHA Top 10 Citations provide another insight into the causes of worker injuries and fatalities.

1. Fall Protection – General Requirements (1926.501): 6,072 violations
2. Hazard Communication (1910.1200): 4,176 violations
3. Scaffolding (1926.451): 3,288 violations
4. Respiratory Protection (1910.134): 3,097 violations
5. **Lockout/Tagout (1910.147): 2,877 violations**– frequent violations were inadequate worker training and inspections not completed. Lockout/tagout procedures are meant to safeguard employees when machinery starts up unexpectedly or when hazardous energy is released during maintenance activities. Failing to train workers or conduct periodic inspections account for many of the violations.
6. Ladders (1926.1053): 2,241 violations
7. Powered Industrial Trucks (1910.178): 2,162 violations
8. Machine Guarding (1910.212): 1,933 violations
9. Fall Protection – Training Requirements: 1,523 violations
10. **Electrical – Wiring Methods (1910.305): 1,405 violations**– Violations of this standard were found in most general industry sectors, including food and beverage, retail, and manufacturing. Faulty electrical wiring methods accounted for 1,405 violations–down from 1,937 in 2016. Frequent violations include improper use of extension cords.

Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect, 2019

April 25, 2019

This 2019 edition of “Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect” marks the 28th year the AFL-CIO has produced a report on the state of safety and health protections for America’s workers. This report features national and state information on workplace fatalities, injuries, illnesses, the number and frequency of workplace inspections, penalties, funding, staffing and public employee coverage under the Occupational Safety and Health Act. It also includes information on the state of mine safety and health.