

## Work-related fatalities

The number of work related deaths decreased overall from 1982 to 1992, despite fluctuations between industries. The National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC) conducted two comprehensive studies into work related injury deaths in Australia. The first study covered the period from 1982 to 1984, while the second collated data between 1989 and 1992. Groups of people studied were workers injured while performing paid duties, bystanders killed by the working activities of another person, and others (including volunteers, students, homemakers and farm workers). Deaths caused by disease and suicide were not included. The main source of information was files from the coroner's office.

### Number of deaths

Between 1989 and 1992, 3,627 Australians lost their lives in work related accidents. This equates to nearly 16 per cent of all deaths during this time period. Of the 3,627 people killed, 2,389 were fatally injured while working or commuting. People aged between 25 and 34 years were over-represented. The majority of deaths occurred during the day, with mid-morning and mid-afternoon peaks. The bulk of the people killed were men (around 90 per cent), whose death rates were - on average - 10 times higher than those recorded for women across all categories. The only exception was the category, 'commuting'; a man is two and a half times more likely than a woman to die while travelling to or from work.

### The most dangerous industries

Some industries are more dangerous than others. The average annual death rate per 100,000 people for the most hazardous industries includes:

- **Forestry** – 93 deaths
- **Fishing** – 86 deaths
- **Mining** – 36 deaths
- **Transport and storage** – 23 deaths
- **Agriculture** – 20 deaths
- **Construction** – 10 deaths.

### The most dangerous occupations

Certain occupations are more dangerous than others. The average annual death rate per 100,000 people for the most hazardous occupations includes:

- **Commercial pilots** – 197 deaths
- **Fishermen and fisherwomen** – 117 deaths
- **Forestry labourers** – 116 deaths
- **Drilling plant operators** – 72 deaths
- **Mining labourers** – 66 deaths
- **Ship's pilots and deck officers** – 54 deaths
- **Structural steel labourers** – 43 deaths
- **Truck drivers** – 41 deaths
- **Excavation and earthmoving machinery operators** – 39 deaths.

### Dangerous places

The most common places for work related deaths include:

- **Public roads** – 33 per cent
- **Farms** – 19 per cent
- **Industrial or construction areas** – 13 per cent
- **Mines or quarries** – 8 per cent
- **Trade or service areas** – 8 per cent.

## Common causes of death

Common injuries include multiple injuries, injuries to the head or body, electrocution, drowning and mechanical asphyxia. The most common causes of fatal work related injuries include:

- Vehicle accidents
- Moving objects
- Falls
- Electricity
- Drowning.

## Alcohol and drugs

Alcohol and drugs appeared to be a contributing factor in around four per cent and two per cent of cases respectively.

## Bystanders

During the time period studied, 778 people were killed by the working activities of another person. This equates to nearly four deaths every week. High risk groups included children on farms.

## Where to get help

- Industrial Deaths Support & Advocacy Inc. (IDSA) Tel.(03) 9309 4453
- Victorian WorkCover Authority Tel. (03) 9641 1444 (for referral only)
- Occupational Health and Safety Officer in your workplace
- Victorian Trades Hall Council (OH.& S Unit) Tel. (03) 9662 3511
- National Association for Loss & Grief (NALAG) Tel. (03) 9351 0358

## Things to remember

- Around 16 per cent of Australian deaths are work related.
- Men account for around 90 per cent of work related deaths, and are 10 times more likely than women to be fatally injured.
- The number of work related deaths decreased overall from 1982 to 1992, despite fluctuations between industries.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Department of Health - Workforce Leadership and Development

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