April 28, 2021

Fatal Occupational Injuries in California

2013 -2019
California Department of Industrial Relations
Division of Occupational Safety and Health
Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) Program

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Thank you for taking the time to read our annual report on workplace fatalities in California, developed by the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries Program (CFOI) with the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR). These reports provide a compilation of important data to provide the public with an overview of the numbers and demographics of occupational deaths, and present reports that provide a jumping off point for deeper analysis for possible trends and causal factors. Despite the analytical presentation of the reports, these numbers represent real people and preventable workplace deaths. We must remain focused and committed to protecting and improving the working conditions for all of California’s workers and remember those who we have lost on this Workers’ Memorial Day.

Introduction

The Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH or Cal/OSHA) of the California Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) gathers statistics on work-related deaths through the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) Program. The CFOI Program was established by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to compile state and national data useful to public health practitioners, safety and health policy analysts and researchers, and regulators to help prevent fatal work-related injuries. DIR’s CFOI Program uses numerous sources to identify and verify work-related injury fatalities. These sources include death certificates, workers’ compensation records, news articles, Cal/OSHA incident reports and OSHA Information System (OIS) records, coroner and police reports, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) records, military reports, social media, and obituaries. Cross-referencing these documents provides thorough information about each work-related fatality including worker characteristics, equipment involved, circumstances of the event, and details of the injury. The detailed data are then aggregated and used to promote safety efforts by employers, workers, and others. As its name indicates, the Census looks only at fatalities resulting from work-related injuries, and does not include deaths from chronic disease resulting from underlying illnesses that manifest on the job such as heart disease, heart attacks, and cancer. This report provides a detailed overview of occupational fatalities that occurred in California between 2013 and 2019.

General Trends

Fatal occupational injuries had been on a downward trend since 1999 when over 600 California workers died from on-the-job injuries. From 2010 to 2017, known injury fatalities in California were under 400 per year. Even during that period, one person per day died from injuries on the job. In 2018, CFOI counted 422 fatal occupational injuries in California, and in 2019 the number of work-related injury fatalities rose again to 451 (Figure. 1).
The rate of fatal occupational injuries per 100,000 California workers had been falling over time through 2017. From 2006 to 2014, the rate fell by over a third from 3.2 to two, and then remained at 2.2 per 100,000 workers from 2015 to 2017. In 2018, the rate rose to 2.3. It rose again to nearly 2.5 per 100,000 workers in 2019. While not completely comparable because of differences in industrial mix, the California fatality rate has been consistently lower than U.S. national rates throughout the recent period. (Figure. 2) Rates for the U.S. as a whole have stabilized around 3.5 per 100,000 workers throughout the last half decade, while California’s fatality rate has risen to 2.5 in 2019.
Figure 2. California and U.S. Occupational Fatality Rate (2006–2019, per 100,000 workers)

Note: Due to new secondary disclosure protections, BLS is not yet publishing information on the month and quarter of fatal injuries. Information in this section is therefore restricted to 2013-2018 data.

Over time, more occupational fatalities have occurred in the summer (Q3, that is, July, August, and September) than in other seasons (Figure 3a and 3b).
Figure 3a. California Fatal Occupational Injuries, by Calendar Quarter (2013–2018)
Every year, men are fatally injured by occupational injuries at a much higher rate than women are. Among the fatal occupational injuries in 2013-19, 2,531 (92 percent) of occupational injury victims in California were men and 222 (8 percent) were women. (Figure 4). The trend of significantly more fatal injuries to men than women continued into 2019. Noteworthy for 2019 is that while the number of women fatally injured stayed at virtually the same level as 2018, the number of fatally injured men increased from 384 to 414.
Age

Between 2013 and 2019, the highest number of work-injury fatalities was among workers 45–54 years of age, with 633 fatalities (23 percent of deaths). Workers 55–64 years of age made up the second largest group of fatalities, with 580 deaths, followed by workers 35 to 44 years of age, with 537 fatalities, and those 25 to 34 with 482 fatalities. (Figure 5a)

In 2019, deaths in the oldest age categories of 55-64, and 65 and older, showed the largest increase over prior years. Figure 5a shows fatalities by age for the 2013 to 2019 period. (Figures 5a and 5b)
Figure 5a. California Fatal Occupational Injuries, by Age 2013-19

California Occupational Injury Fatalities by Age by Year

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<td>55 to 64 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>65 years and older</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>58</td>
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</tbody>
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Figure 5b. California Fatal Occupational Injuries, by Age (2019), N=451

- 65 years and older: 13%
- 55 to 64 years: 22%
- 45 to 54 years: 22%
- 35 to 44 years: 19%
- 25 to 34 years: 15%
- 20 to 24 years: 7%
- 16 to 19 years: 2%
- 65 years and older: 13%
Race and Ethnicity

The CFOI program compiles information on race and ethnicity in all fatal occupational injury cases. This stands in contrast to the nonfatal occupational injury series collected by BLS (Survey of Occupational Injury and Illness-SOII), where race and ethnicity are optional data elements which are often not determined. Between 2013 and 2018, approximately 44 percent of occupational fatalities were among Hispanic or Latino workers. Fatal injuries to non-Hispanic white workers comprises 41 percent of the occupational fatalities recorded over that six-year period. Asian, Pacific Islander, and Hawaiian workers comprised 8 percent of the six-year total, while Black/African American workers made up over 5 percent of the total. (Figure 6a)

In 2019, an increasing number and proportion of workers who died from injuries on the job in California were Hispanic or Latino. Of the 451 fatalities in 2019, 211 or nearly 47 percent were Hispanic/Latino. White non-Hispanic workers comprises 169 of the fatalities, dropping the proportion from a five-year average of 41.4 percent of cases, to 37.5 percent in 2019. Fatalities among Asian workers grew from eight percent in 2014-18 to 9.5 percent of the total in 2019. The number of Black or African American fatalities was 20 in 2019, corresponding to the prior five-year average. (Figure 6b).

Figure 6a. California Fatal Occupational Injuries, by Race/Ethnicity (2013–2019)

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<td>144</td>
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<td>169</td>
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<tr>
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<td>148</td>
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<td>190</td>
<td>211</td>
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Employment Status

CFOI covers all work-related deaths in California and includes employed workers, the self-employed, independent contractors, freelancers, and others who do not work for a specific employer. For the 2013 to 2019 period, five out of six fatalities (82 percent) occurred to persons employed as wage and salary workers, compared with self-employed workers, who made up 18 percent of fatalities. (Figure 7a)

Counts of those fatally injured on the job by employment status for the 2013-19 period show some fluctuation from one year to the next; however, the number of wage and salary workers killed on the job consistently exceeds such reports for self-employed workers by a large amount.
For 2019, the total number of wage and salary workers killed on the job stayed the same as in 2018. However, there was a large increase in the number of self-employed workers killed on the job in 2019 (100) compared to 2018 (72) and other recent years. The proportion of wage and salary workers fatally injured in 2019 fell to 78 percent, while that of self-employed workers rose to 22 percent (Figure 7b). This self-employed cohort is the largest figure recorded since at least 2013. This increase warrants more analysis into the nature of the self-employment of those workers who died, e.g. work arrangements and industries, and comparison to other available data on changes in the numbers and percentages of self-employed workers.
Causes of Fatal Events

Transportation Incidents cause the most occupational injury fatalities. Such events led to 36 percent of all occupational fatalities during the 2013–2019 period. In those seven years, fatal injuries due to Assaults and Violent Acts made up the next largest segment with 20 percent, and Falls, Trips, and Slips accounted for 19 percent of fatalities. Contact with Objects and Equipment caused 13 percent of the total. Nine percent of the recorded deaths in 2013-19 were caused by Exposure to Harmful Substances, and Fires and Explosions accounted for 1 percent of cases. (Figures 8a and 8b).

In 2017 alone, Falls, Trips, and Slips accounted for more fatalities than Assaults and Violent Acts, reversing the order of the prior four years. However, in 2018, violence related cases were up significantly, with 92 workers fatally injured by Assaults and Violent Acts.

In 2019, Transportation Incidents remained the largest category of occupational fatality cause, while the number of deaths by Assaults and Violent Acts crept even further up, possibly indicating that the large increase that occurred in 2018 was not an aberration. The largest increase between 2018 and 2019, however, came among those fatally Exposed to Harmful...
Substances (from 39 to 66 deaths from 2018-19) and in Falls, Trips, and Slips, (rising from 73 to 88 fatalities), the most recorded since at least 2013. (Figure 8a.)

**Figure 8a. California Fatal Occupational Injuries, by Event (2013–2019)**

In 2019, transportation incidents took the lives of 141 workers. Roadway crashes killed 77 worker. Thirty-one pedestrians were fatally injured after being stuck by a vehicle while working. Nine occupational deaths involved aircraft, and three involved a rail vehicle. One hundred thirteen were wage and salary workers, while 28 were self-employed. Eighty percent were men, and 20 percent women.

There were 94 deaths in 2019 involving intentional injury: 50 homicides and 44 suicides. Three of four homicides and one in four suicides involved shootings. In 2019, 28 percent of work-related violence fatalities involved self-employed persons, compared to 22 percent of the overall fatality count. Fourteen violence related deaths involved government workers. By occupation, 14 sales workers, 13 protective service workers, and 13 managers died from intentional violence on the job.
Eighty-Eight fatal injuries involved falls, slips or trips. Construction workers died in 31 such incidents, and 15 building and grounds maintenance workers died that way. Half of the fatal falls were Hispanic workers.

Of 55 fatal injuries involving contact with objects or equipment in 2019, all were men. Hispanic workers died in 40 such incidents. By occupation, 15 construction workers were so killed, as were 12 drivers or material moving workers.

Among the 66 fatalities from Exposure to Harmful Substances or Environments 10 workers were self-employed and 60 were men. Three of four were over 35 years in age. (Figure 8b)

**Figure 8b. California Fatal Occupational Injuries, by Event, Number and Percentage of total (2019)**

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**Industry**

The figures below show totals (Figure 9a) and trends (Figure 9b) in California work injury fatalities by industry for years 2013-2019.
The Trade, Transportation, and Utilities (TTU) industry had the highest number of fatalities during each of those years, averaging over 100 occupational deaths annually, or one-fourth of cases. In 2018, TTU reported 101 cases, including 56 fatalities from Transportation Incidents, 18 cases of violence-related fatality, 11 cases of Contact with Objects and Equipment, and 11 from Falls, Trips, and Slips. In 2019, TTU accounted for 118 fatalities, with 55 deaths from Transportation Incidents, 16 Homicides, and 10 from Falls, Trips, and Slips.

The Construction industry had the next highest number of fatalities with 464 fatalities (17 percent) for the 2013-2019 period. Of the 71 cases in 2018, 29 fatalities in Construction were from Falls, Trips, and Slips and 16 from Transportation Incidents. In 2019, Construction fatalities rose to 84, including 35 Falls, Trips, and Slips, 17 Transportation Incidents, and 13 cases involving Contacts with Objects and Equipment.

Professional and Business Services, including accountants, lawyers, engineers, computer programmers, consultants, and researchers, accounted for 393 deaths (14 percent of total) in the 2013-2019 years. Of the 70 fatalities in 2018 (up from 67 cases in 2017), 20 were involved in Transportation Incidents, while 16 fatalities resulted from Falls, Trips, and Slips, and 13 from violent acts. Twenty-four workers in Landscaping services were fatally injured in 2018, down from
32 fatally injured in 2017. In 2019, 60 Professional and Business Services workers died from on-the-job injuries, including 10 from Transportation Incidents, and nine from intentional violence.

The Manufacturing industry had 160 fatalities in the 2013–2019 period. Of the 20 fatalities in 2018, eight were from Contacts with Objects and Equipment, six were from Falls, Trips, and Slips, and three from Transportation Incidents. In 2019, 24 died in Manufacturing, including 11 from Contacts with Objects and Equipment, five from Violence, and four each from Transportation incidents and Falls, Trips, and Slips.

The Leisure and Hospitality industry accounted for 144 deaths during the seven-year period. Among the 24 fatalities in 2018, doubling the number in 2017, violence and assaults accounted for 16 fatalities. Three fatalities were attributed to Exposures to Harmful Substances or Environments and three were from Transportation incidents. In 2019, 26 workers died, including five in Transportation Incidents, five from Exposure to Harmful Substances, and four from Falls, Trips, and Slips.

Figure 9b. California Fatal Occupational Injuries, by Industry Group by Year (2013–2019)
**Fatality Rate by Industry**

Dangerous industries are identified by analyzing fatality rates. CFOI publishes data on fatal injury rates by industry. Fatal injury rates depict the risk of incurring a fatal work injury for workers in a given worker group expressed as the number of fatal injuries per 100,000 full-time equivalent workers. This allows risks to be compared among different worker groups. To produce a fatal injury rate for an industry, the number of fatal work injuries in a given industry is divided by the total hours worked in that industrial sector and multiplied by 200,000,000 (the base for 100,000 equivalent full-time workers working 40 hours per week, 50 weeks per year).

The average fatality rate for California by industry for 2013–2019 is shown below as 2.3 fatalities per 100,000 full-time workers. Agriculture, with a rate over 11 fatalities per 100,000 workers had the highest fatality rate over the seven years. Transportation and Utilities (7 per 100,000) and Construction (six fatalities per 100,000) also generated high fatality rates. (Figure 10a)

**Figure 10a. California Average Fatality Rate, by Industry (2013–2019, per 100,000 workers)**

Figure 10b shows the fatality rate by industry for the years 2013-2019.
On average, 2.3 workers per 100,000 in California were killed on the job each year over the 2013-2019 period. Three industries in California show high rates of worker deaths: Agriculture, Transportation and Utilities, and Construction. The fatality rate in the agriculture industry rose nearly 50 percent in 2019 over the prior year. During the same period, the fatality rates for “other
“services” industries increased by 93 percent, while the rate in the wholesale trade industry rose 76 percent.

**Occupation**

More than one in four occupational fatalities over the 2013–2019 period involved Transportation and Material Moving occupations, including truck drivers. Construction and Extraction occupations have the next highest share, with 17 percent of cases, followed by Agricultural Occupations (Farming, Fishing and Forestry) and Installation, Maintenance, and Repair occupations, each at eight percent. Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance workers accounted for seven percent. (Figures 11a and 11b).

Since 2013, almost 400 workers per year have died on the job. Their deaths occur throughout all types of work. Of the 2,753 workers, nearly 700 transportation and material moving workers have been fatally injured on the job. In the construction and extraction industries, 461 have died. Another 215 have died in farming, fishing or forestry occupations. Other work categories with over 100 fatalities include installation and repair workers (209) buildings and grounds cleaning or maintenance workers (205), professional and related workers (194) and protective services (181).
In 2019, deaths among transportation and material moving workers went up another 15 percent over the prior year. There were 115 such fatalities in 2019. Sixty-nine of those were transportation incidents, but the other 40 percent included 14 fatal injuries by violence, 12 by contacts with equipment and objects, and 10 from hazardous exposures.

Among construction and extraction occupations, the largest number of the 75 fatalities were from falls (31), contact with objects (15), exposure to hazardous environments (11), and transportation incidents (9).

A majority of fatalities among farming occupations (19 of 37 total) were caused by transportation incidents.
Figure 11b. California Fatal Occupational Injuries, by Selected Occupation Group (2013–2019)
Summary

The Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) compiles a count of all fatal work-related injuries occurring in the U.S. during each calendar year. The CFOI Program for California, administered jointly by the Division of Occupational Safety and Health/California Department of Industrial Relations and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, uses diverse state, federal, and independent data sources to identify, verify, and describe fatal work-related injuries.

Note: Starting with the release of 2019 CFOI data, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) implemented new disclosure rules to protect confidential data from secondary disclosure. As a result, there has been a reduction in the amount of detail that can be published compared to prior years.

Fatal occupational injuries in California had been on a downward trend since 1999 when over 600 workers died from on-the-job injuries. From 2010 to 2017, the number of such fatalities has been below 400 every year. In 2018, there were 422 fatal occupational injuries in California, the highest number since 2008. (Figure. 1) The number of fatalities rose again in 2019 to 451 or nine deaths a week in the state.

The rate of fatal injury is the number of fatalities per 100,000 workers in California. California’s rate has been below three fatal injuries per 100,000 workers in every year since 2002, except in 2006. From 2015 to 2017 the rate was stable at 2.2, but in 2018 it rose to 2.3 and then to 2.5 fatalities per 100,000 workers in 2019. Rates for the U.S. as a whole have stabilized around 3.5 per 100,000 workers throughout the last half decade, while California’s fatality rate has risen.

Over time, more occupational fatalities have occurred in the summer (July, August, and September, i.e., the third quarter) than in other seasons. (Note: data is only available through 2018.)

Each year, men are fatally injured by occupational injuries at a much higher rate than women are. Among the fatal occupational injuries in 2013-19, 92 percent of occupational injury victims in California were men and 8 percent were women.

In 2019, deaths in the oldest age categories of 55 to 64, and 65 and older, showed the largest increase over prior years.

California’s workforce is approximately 40 percent Hispanic. Over 44 percent of occupational fatalities in 2013–2019 were among Hispanic or Latino workers. Of 451 workers who died from injuries on the job in California in 2019, 211 (nearly 47 percent), were Hispanic/Latino. White non-Hispanic workers comprised 169 of the fatalities, dropping their proportion from a six-year (2013-18) average of 41.4 percent of cases, to 37.5 percent in 2019.

CFOI covers all work-related deaths in California and includes the self-employed, independent contractors, freelancers and others who do not work for a specific employer. For 2013-2019, the large majority of fatalities (82 percent) occurred to persons employed as wage and salary
workers, compared with self-employed workers, who made up 18 percent. For the 2019 year, the proportion of wage and salary workers fatally injured under the CFOI fell to 78 percent, while that of self-employed workers rose to 22 percent. This is the largest figure recorded since at least 2013.

Transportation Incidents comprises 36 percent of all occupational fatalities over the 2013-19 years. Fatal injuries due to Assaults and Violent Acts were the next largest portion with 21 percent, and Falls, Trips, and Slips accounted for 19 percent. In 2019, Transportation Incidents remained the largest category of occupational fatality cause, while the number of death by Assault and Violent Acts crept even further up, possibly indicating that the large increase that occurred in 2018 was not an aberration. The largest increase between 2018 and 2019, however, came among those fatally Exposed to Harmful Substances (from 39 to 66 death from 2018-19) and in Falls, Trips and Slips, (rising to 88 fatalities, the most recorded since at least 2013).

By Industry, the Trade, Transportation, and Utilities sector had the highest number of fatalities during 2013-19, averaging over 100 occupational deaths or more than a quarter of all cases per year. The Construction industry had the next highest number of fatalities, averaging 66 fatalities per year.

On average, 2.3 workers per 100,000 in California were killed on the job each year over the 2013-2019 period. Three industries in California show high rates of worker deaths: Agriculture, Transportation and Utilities, and Construction. The fatality rate in the agriculture industry rose nearly 50 percent in 2019 over the prior year. During the same period, the fatality rates for “other services” industries increased by 93 percent, while the rate in the wholesale trade industry rose 76 percent.

More than 25 percent of occupational fatalities over the 2013–2019 period involved Transportation and Material Moving occupations, including truck drivers. Construction and Extraction industries are next in number with 17 percent of cases, followed by Agricultural occupations (8 percent). Installation, Maintenance, and Repair (8 percent) and Cleaning and Maintenance workers (7 percent of fatalities.)

In 2019, Agriculture workers’ fatality rate rose another nearly 50 percent over the prior year. For other industries, the rates for “other services” shot up by 93 percent. Wholesale trade’s fatality rate was up 76 percent. Education industry rate went up 40 percent.
The Injuries, Illnesses, and Fatalities (IIF) program of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) provides annual information on the rate and number of work-related injuries, illnesses, and fatal injuries and how these statistics vary by incident, industry, geography, occupation, and other characteristics. These data are collected through the Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses (SOII) and the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI).

The CFOI compiles a count of all fatal workplace injuries occurring in the U.S. during the calendar year. The CFOI Program uses diverse state, federal, and independent data sources to identify, verify, and describe fatal work-related injuries. This approach ensures counts are as complete and accurate as possible. For technical information and definitions for the CFOI, please go to Chapter 9 of the BLS Handbook of Methods on the BLS website, at www.bls.gov/opub/hom/pdf/homch9.pdf.

Data compiled by the CFOI Program are issued annually for the preceding calendar year. This data can be used by safety and health policy analysts and researchers to help prevent fatal work injuries in the following ways:

- Informing workers of life-threatening hazards associated with various jobs;
- Promoting safer work practices through enhanced job safety training;
- Assessing and improving workplace safety standards; and
- Identifying new areas of safety research.

Fatal injury rates are per 100,000 full-time equivalent workers (FTEs). Complete national rates can be found at www.bls.gov/iif/oshcfoi1.htm#rates. Complete state rates can be found at www.bls.gov/iif/oshstate.htm. National and state rates are calculated using different methodology and cannot be directly compared. Please see www.bls.gov/iif/oshfaq1.htm#q17 for more information on how rates are calculated and caveats for comparison.

Note: For 2019, starting with the release of 2019 CFOI data, BLS implemented new disclosure rules to protect confidential data from secondary disclosure. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in the amount of detail that can be published compared to prior years. For instance, no data on month or quarter of injury in 2019 was available for this report.