

Beyond The Cab

The only safety management newsletter dedicated exclusively to addressing injury prevention and workers' compensation cost control for trucking companies.



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A Call to Action

Back in September 2004 the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released a summary of fatal injuries for the 2003 calendar year. If you remember seeing that information, you undoubtedly recall that the transportation industry (particularly the trucking industry) was overrepresented in fatal work-related injuries. Subsequent to that, BLS released a report that reflected the frequency (incident rates) of non-fatal injuries for 2003. Just recently (March 30, 2005) BLS released additional data, this time reflecting the non-fatal work-related injury statistics that resulted in time away from work for the 2003 calendar year.



The recent BLS report indicated that there were 1.3 million injuries and illnesses in private industry that required recuperation away from work beyond the day of the incident in 2003. However, before revealing the data that is specific to trucking, it's important to understand that BLS analyzes data based upon two different classification systems. One classification system analyzes data based upon industries. The other analyzes data based upon occupations. To understand the difference, consider the following.

Data based upon the trucking "industry" includes injury data from everyone in that industry, regardless of their job duties. It obviously includes truck drivers who are employed by a trucking company, but is also includes mechanics, dispatchers, clerical employees, recruiters, dock workers and others, as long as they are employed in the trucking industry. However, it does not include truck drivers who are employed outside of the trucking industry.

On the other hand, data based upon the "occupation" of truck driver only includes truck drivers. It does not include clerical employees, dispatchers, dock workers, etc. But unlike industry data, it includes truck drivers who are employed outside of the trucking industry. These would include truck drivers employed by construction companies, warehouse operations, retail stores, or any other industry that employs truck drivers.

For the purpose of BLS data, the trucking industry falls into the major industry sector "*Trade, Transportation & Utilities*." Within that major industry sector, strains and sprains were the leading cause of injury in 2003. In fact, strains/sprains within that major industry sector account for 1/3 of all lost workday injuries of that type in 2003. This means that there were more lost-workday strain/sprain injuries within the "*Trade, Transportation & Utilities*" sector than in manufacturing, construction, agriculture, and mining combined.

Now let's look at the BLS data that is categorized based upon "occupation," as opposed to "industry." For the purposes of BLS data, truck drivers fall into the broad classification of "*Transportation & Material Moving*." That major occupational group is subdivided and includes (among other occupations) two different classifications of truck drivers. These are "*Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers*" and "*Light or Delivery Service Truck Drivers*" During 2003, both of these truck driver occupations were overrepresented in the number of lost workday injuries in 2003. In fact, both truck driver occupations were among the 12 occupations identified as having the most lost workday injuries in 2003. If that is not disturbing enough, consider the fact that within the broad category of "*Transportation & Material Moving*

Occupations" there were more injuries and illnesses with days away from work than any other major occupational group (259,920) in 2003.

Not only were truck drivers overrepresented in the number of lost workday strain/sprain injuries in 2003, they also have the worst statistic regarding the median number of days off work as a result of work-related injuries. "*Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers*" had the highest median days away from work (14 days). However, the other truck driver classification "*Light or Delivery Service Truck Drivers*" had the third highest statistic, with a median of 11 days away from work.

This newly-released data is a call to action. It puts the spotlight on the need for prevention of strain/sprain injuries, and upon minimizing the number of days off work following a work-related injury. Both are areas in which many trucking companies have significant room for improvement.

If you would like to review the full reports, they can be found at www.bls.gov

In the event that you've seen similar BLS data in years past, let this serve as a caution to avoid comparing this data with the previous BLS data. The newly-released 2003 year data represents the first year that the BLS stopped using the Standard Industrial Code (SIC) and the Bureau of Census occupational classification system. Instead, they began using the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) to categorize industries and the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system to categorize occupations. Whereas this more modern system provides a more accurate representation of the data, it doesn't allow us to compare data from one year to the next (at least not until next year).