

Workers' Compensation Facts and Stats at a Glance

Over 124 million workers nationwide are covered by the workers' compensation system.¹ In 2010, 4,690 workers—an average of 13 every day—were killed on the job.² Another 50,000 died from occupational diseases.³ While more than 3.8 million occupational injuries and illnesses are reported annually, the high rates of underreporting suggest that the real number of work-related injuries and illnesses each year is between 7.6 million and 11.4 million.⁴

- Due to factors including fear of retaliation from employers, lack of awareness, and the negative experience of others with the system, a substantial number of injured and ill workers do not even file for workers' comp benefits. Studies have found that, on average, only 55% of injured workers⁵ and between 9% and 45% of ill workers file claims.⁶ In a recent GAO study, 67% of occupational health care providers reported workers fear disciplinary action for reporting a job related injury or illness.⁷ One survey of low wage workers found that only 8% of those seriously injured at work filed a complaint.⁸
- Occupational injuries and illnesses are among the five leading causes of sickness and death nationwide.⁹ However, workers with occupational illnesses face nearly insurmountable barriers within the workers' compensation system. A mere 1 out of 20 occupational disease victims receives workers' compensation benefits. For occupational cancer, the number is fewer than 1 in a 100.¹⁰
- Workers' compensation benefits cover less than 25% of the costs of workplace illnesses and injuries,¹¹ shifting the vast majority of these costs to workers and their families, private medical insurance, and government programs.¹²
- The myth of rampant employee fraud stigmatizes workers, contributes to underreporting, and perpetuates policies that slash benefits for injured workers. In fact, worker fraud is found in less than 1 to 2% of all cases.¹³ Employer and provider fraud—which can have devastating consequences for injured workers—are far more costly. For example, in New York alone, employee misclassification by employers costs between \$500 million and \$1 billion a year in evaded premiums.¹⁴

¹ National Academy of Social Insurance. *Workers' Compensation: Benefits, Coverage, and Costs, 2010*, at p. 1 (August 2012).

² AFL-CIO. *Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect, 21st Ed.*, at p. 1 (April 2012).

³ AFL-CIO. *Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect, 21st Ed.*, at p. 1 (April 2012).

⁴ AFL-CIO. *Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect, 21st Ed.*, at p. 1 (April 2012).

⁵ Lakdawallah et al. *How Does Health Insurance Affect Workers' Compensation filing*. RAND Working Paper, at p. 8 (2005).

⁶ Biddle et al. *What percentage of workers with work-related illnesses receive workers' compensation benefits?* *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, Vol. 40, Number 4 (1998).

⁷ General Accountability Office. *Workplace Safety and Health: Enhancing OSHA's records audit process could improve the accuracy of worker injury and illness data*, at p. 17 (2009).

⁸ Annette Bernhardt et. al. *Broken Laws, Unprotected Workers: Violations of Employment and Labor Laws in America's Cities*. Center for Urban Economic Development, National Employment Law Project, UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment, at p. 4 (2009).

⁹ Joseph LaDou. *Workers' Compensation in the United States: Cost Shifting and Inequities in a Dysfunctional System*. *New Solutions*, Vol. 20 (3) 291-302, at p. 292 (2010).

¹⁰ Joseph LaDou. *Workers' Compensation in the United States: Cost Shifting and Inequities in a Dysfunctional System*. *New Solutions*, Vol. 20 (3) 291-302, at p. 292 (2010).

¹¹ J. Paul Leigh. *U.S. Economic Burden of Occupational Injury and Illness*, *Milbank Quarterly*, Vol. 89, Issue 4, 729, at p. 749-750 (22 Dec. 2011).

¹² Joseph LaDou, *The European influence on workers' compensation reform in the United States*, *Environmental Health* (2011).

¹³ Lisa Cullen. *The Myth of Workers' Compensation Fraud*. PBS Frontline: A Dangerous Business. (January 9, 2003).

¹⁴ Fiscal Policy Institute. *New York Workers' Compensation: How Big is the Coverage Shortfall?*, at p. 2 (January 25, 2007).