Workers’ Compensation Facts and Stats at a Glance

Over 124 million workers nationwide are covered by the workers’ compensation system. In 2010, 4,690 workers—an average of 13 every day—were killed on the job. Another 50,000 died from occupational diseases. 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.

- 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 workers and between 9% and 45% of ill workers file claims. In a recent GAO study, 67% of occupational health care providers reported workers fear disciplinary action for reporting a job related injury or illness. One survey of low wage workers found that only 8% of those seriously injured at work filed a complaint.

- Occupational injuries and illnesses are among the five leading causes of sickness and death nationwide. 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.

- Workers’ compensation benefits cover less than 25% of the costs of workplace illnesses and injuries, shifting the vast majority of these costs to workers and their families, private medical insurance, and government programs.

- 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. 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.

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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).