

PREVENTING WORK-RELATED INJURIES

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

- Fifteen U.S. workers die as a result of injuries at work, 200 are hospitalized, and 11,000 are treated in hospital emergency departments each year. Additional injuries are treated in physicians' offices, clinics, and at worksites.
- The direct costs of occupational injuries and illnesses were estimated to be \$45.8 billion in 2001 (2003 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index). The indirect costs were estimated to be an additional \$137.4 to \$229 billion.
- The leading causes of fatal occupational injuries are related to transportation, contact with objects and equipment (e.g., being struck by an object, striking against an object, being caught in equipment), and violence.
- Overexertion, contact with objects and equipment, and falls are the leading causes of nonfatal occupational injuries.
- Technological advances, the design and organization of work, and persistent hazards all create constant demands for new research and information to protect workers from injury.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC developed the nation's principal research program for the prevention of work-related injuries. CDC scientists, as well as researchers and professionals at universities and state agencies throughout the United States, engage in all aspects of injury prevention. For example,

- Injury surveillance is used to identify potential risk factors and monitor trends over time.
- Workplace protections have been improved because of various research initiatives (e.g., safety systems for machinery and protective equipment for workers).
- Intervention studies were created to evaluate the real-world effectiveness of protection strategies.
- Communication programs were developed to ensure that employers, managers, workers, and safety and health professionals have ready-access to the latest injury prevention information.
- The traumatic injury research program focuses on the leading causes of injury and death and on the highest risk industry sectors (i.e., agriculture, mining, construction). Since 1980, this program has helped reduce the rate of fatal occupational injuries nationwide by 46%.

Example of Program in Action

CDC developed and evaluated an injury prevention program for reducing the incidence, severity, and cost of back injuries, a persistent problem for nursing home workers. Research showed the program paid for itself in less than 3 years by reducing injury frequency by 57%, injury rates by 61%, and workers' compensation expenses by 37%.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Although traumatic injury rates are decreasing in many industry sectors and occupational groups, workplace injury still takes a huge toll on the American workforce. Research is needed to address persistent hazards (e.g., falls in construction and tractor rollovers in agriculture) as well as emerging hazards (e.g., highway construction work zones).