

Some Canadian Workplace Injury and Fatality Facts

Predictable and Preventable Deaths

Fatalities in the workplace result from both accidents and occupational diseases so both health and safety issues are important to understand and grasp the severity of the present situation in Canada. In Canada (2012 population of 34.7 million¹) the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada indicates:

In 2008 there were approximately three occupational fatalities each day of the year.²

Between 1993 and 2005 work-related deaths rose from 758 in 1993 to 1,097 in 2005 – up 45 %. It is a matter of grave concern for many Canadian citizens that overall the number of workplace deaths has been rising over the last two decades.³

As Canadians work on average 230 days per year, this means that there were nearly five work-related deaths per working day in this country.⁴

In 2008, approximately one worker out of every 13,805 workers covered by provincial or territorial compensation systems died from an occupational injury.⁵

Canada has a National Day of Mourning every April 28 which commemorates workers whose lives were lost or injured in our workplaces across our country in the previous year.

The numbers are staggering. In 2010, 1014* workplace deaths were recorded in Canada – an increase from 939 the previous year. This represents more than 2.78 deaths every single day.

In the eighteen year period from 1993 to 2010, 16,143 people lost their lives due to work-related causes (an average of 897 [Canadian] deaths per year).⁶

*Fatalities accepted in 2010 according to “Number of Fatalities, by Jurisdiction 1993-2010” summary table, statistics from the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada

This does not include the many workers who are not covered by workers' compensation and who do not appear in WCB data bases. For example, in 2010, Alberta had 22 deaths on Alberta farms. These deaths are not counted under Alberta Workers' Compensation Board death statistics as these deaths are not compensated deaths since agricultural workers, farmers, and ranchers do not fall under the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board system.⁷ Further to this example, in the following period from 1993 to 2009, many

deaths from occupational disease such as asbestosis were not included in the Canadian statistics compiled by the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada. The point is that our deaths are actually significantly higher than our traditional sources of data show.

The ILO (International Labor Organization) workplace fatality database shows that in 2003 Canada had the fifth highest incidence of workplace fatalities out of 29 OECD (Organization for Economic and Co-operative Development) countries. Only Korea, Mexico, Portugal, and Turkey had higher workplace fatality rates and all four countries are at a much lower level of development than Canada.⁸

When Canada is compared with other OECD countries you will find we are not doing very well. For example, in 2003 Canada had 6.1 workplace deaths per 100,000 workers among a group of 29 developed countries. Using the factor of deaths/100,000 workers we were only safer on average than Korea (29 deaths), Turkey (20.6 deaths), Mexico (12.0 deaths), Portugal (8.7 deaths) and then Canada with 6.1 deaths per 100,000 workers.¹⁰ All four of these countries are at a significantly lower level of development than Canada.¹¹ Of the 29 developed countries 24 had significantly lower workplace deaths rates than Canada. It is a simple truth that Canada is a dangerous country for work people!

In 2005, according to the Centre for the Study of Living Standards, there were 1,097 workplace fatalities in Canada. In addition to this fact, where you do your job in Canada seems to be a factor. Of those killed across Canada in 2005, the highest on the job death rate was in the Territories, with 27.4 deaths per 100,000 workers—four times the 2005 Canadian national average or 6.8 deaths per 100,000 workers. According to the study, the following is the ranking of workplace fatalities by jurisdictions in Canada:

1. The Territories (NT, NU, YT) – 27.4 deaths per 100,000 workers
2. Newfoundland & Labrador – 11.7 deaths per 100,000 workers
3. British Columbia – 8.9 deaths per 100,000 workers
4. Alberta – 8.0 deaths per 100,000 workers
5. Ontario – 6.5 deaths per 100,000 workers
6. Nova Scotia – 6.1 deaths per 100,000 workers
7. Quebec – 6.0 deaths per 100,000 workers
8. Saskatchewan – 5.6 deaths per 100,000 workers
9. Manitoba – 4.5 deaths per 100,000, workers
10. New Brunswick – 3.4 deaths per 100,000 workers
11. Prince Edward Island – 1.5 deaths per 100,000 workers⁹

This data represents a Canada-wide average of 6.8 deaths per 100,000 workers for 2005.

Predictable and Preventable Injuries

As indicated previously an average of three people a day (365 days in a year) die in a Canadian workplace and, in addition, nearly one million are injured at work every year in Canada.

In 2008 one Canadian worker out of every 46 workers covered by provincial or territorial compensation systems was injured severely enough to miss at least one day of work.¹²

In Canada, over the period 1996 to 2008, an average of slightly less than one million occupational injury claims have been reported each year by provincial or territorial WCBs.¹³

Over the 1996 to 2008 period, compensation payments to injured workers, after adjusting for inflation, have generally shown an increasing trend.¹⁴

Generally speaking each year in Canada approximately one million people are injured and thousands more become sick or diseased by their work. It is important to recognize that a single number represents a resident of Canada who may be part of your family, a neighbor, a work colleague, a member of one of your community groups, etc. Each single number is or was a living, breathing, and caring human being. When reading human statistics, this is so important to remember!

Youth

Young, new and inexperienced workers with their new roles and responsibilities are at a disadvantage when it comes to worksite hazards. Being unconscious of the hazards or lacking the competency to manage the risks from their associated duties and surrounding work environment increases their potential and severity of incidents and injuries.¹⁵

Statistically, young people and new hires are more at risk of injury on the job. Among injured workers under the age of 25, more than 50% of them were hurt in the first six months on the job. Nearly 20% of the injuries and fatalities happen during the first month on the job.¹⁶

Many of these younger workers have not yet fully developed their ability to evaluate the conditions, actions, and events that could potentially cause them harm. Neuroscientists are learning that the part of the brain involved with making sound judgments and controlling emotions is the last part of the brain to mature.¹⁷ Few workplace safety programs address the special learning needs of younger workers. *SafeThink*TM places an emphasis on a critical thinking strategy that young workers need to learn and use to identify potential hazards both on and off the job. Youth in middle schools, junior high and senior high schools can learn the SafeThink structured critical thinking strategy to keep themselves safe in school workplaces like: career and technology classes and laboratories, work experience placements, on the playground, and in sports. Students can also use SafeThink on ranches and family farms where rural youth regularly work across Canada.

According to an article, “*Setting an Agenda for Advancing Your Worker safety in the U.S. and Canada*,” of *Public Health Reports* in their May/June 2012 issue there are 17.6

million workers under age 25 employed when the two countries are combined together. In 2010, nearly 3 million of these workers were Canadian youth employed in the age range of 15 to 24. These youth need a comprehensive safety strategy that **actively engages their minds** in working to keep themselves safe at home, on the farm, in the workplace, and in their leisure time activities. This article includes significant other data that indicates youth are particularly in need of safety in the workplace. Our own work experience coordinators and teachers in our Alberta school districts are often lacking in knowledge of how to teach a structured critical thinking strategy that enables youth to learn **to identify and predict hazardous situations** in the workplace where they are placed as part of their school program.

The Dollars

From 1996 to 2008 compensation payments by Workers Compensation Boards (WCBs) to injured workers, after inflation adjustments, have gradually trended upwards.¹⁸

In 2008, the WCBs paid \$7.67 billion in benefit payments, or an average of approximately \$24,845 per each new compensated (accepted) time-loss injury or fatality.¹⁹

In addition, the WCBs paid \$2.03 billion in health care and vocational rehabilitation payments in 2008. Including these costs, the total direct annual costs of occupation injuries and fatalities to the Canadian economy were approximately \$9.7 billion in 2008.²⁰

Factoring in direct and indirect costs, the total costs of occupational injuries to Canadian economy, can now be estimated to be more than \$19 billion annually.²¹

Canada's budget deficit for 2011 was \$29.6 billion.²² To illustrate a point, starting to solve our national injury problem would make a huge contribution towards paying our present national budget deficit. Over a period of 20 years, not counting for inflation, our cost for injuries is 380 billion dollars (\$19 billion x 20 years=\$380 billion). Can you imagine the impact of contributing this over time to the education of our youth, or the elimination of poverty and homelessness in Canada? Can you imagine other positive financial effects on our Canadian Society, like lower taxes, if we became more competent through our thinking at **identifying and predicting hazardous situations**, thus significantly reducing injuries? And, of course, the huge intangible cost of family and personal grief, sorrow, and sadness that comes with each WCB compensated injury or death is difficult to measure in a meaningful way. And, finally, all of the injuries and deaths not included or covered by WCBs are missing from the picture illustrated here!

If we in Canada master the capability of significantly reducing the present statistics of predictable and preventable deaths and injuries that present a huge human tragedy in Canada, we will have a gift to share with the world that is second to none!

Some Alberta Injury and Fatality Facts

It is important to note that the Canadian facts presented in the previous section were specifically focused on the workplace. In this section on Alberta facts, predictable and preventable deaths and injuries are more inclusive than just the workplace. I am illustrating that we have a broader problem in Alberta and elsewhere in Canada than just the problem of **workplace** injuries and deaths. Here, the broader issue of injuries and deaths is presented. For example, in the ten year time period of 1999 to 2008 motor vehicle-related deaths were the leading cause of injury death for Alberta residents who were 1 to 29 years of age. The three category groups in the tables include suicides, motor vehicles, poisoning, falls, violence purposely inflicted, suffocation/choking, drowning, and all other injuries recorded by Alberta Health and Wellness and compiled by the Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research (ACICR).

Predictable and Preventable Deaths and Injuries in Alberta

Information compiled by ACICR in the School of Public Health at the University of Alberta illustrates the significant number of predictable and preventable deaths and injuries in Alberta for two years—2006 and 2008.

Table 1

2006		
Alberta Predictable and Preventable Deaths and Injuries from Hazardous Situations		
Deaths	Hospital Admissions Resulting from Injuries	Emergency Department Visits Resulting from Injuries
1,727	51,280	433,129

Moving two years forward the ACICR data shows:

Table 2

2008		
Alberta Predictable and Preventable Deaths and Injuries from Hazardous Situations		
Deaths	Hospital Admissions Resulting from Injuries	Emergency Department Visits Resulting from Injuries
1,777	52,400	436,935

Note the upward trend illustrated between Table 1 (2006) and Table 2 (2008) in all three categories. From 2006 to 2008 the number of predictable and preventable deaths rose by 50 persons. Hospital admissions resulting from injuries rose by 1,120 persons and emergency department visits resulting from injuries rose by 3,806 persons. The total increase in all three areas adds up to 4,976 persons—a number approximately equal to the population of Vermilion, Alberta!

Now some might say there was increased economic activity and we should therefore expect a rise in the number of persons injured and killed. But I ask, “Should we accept the idea that increased economic activity will automatically result in more injuries and deaths?” Why should economic activity be a justification for injuries and death? Why do we continue to accept predictable and preventable deaths and injuries as an acceptable outcome of our busy lives? Why don’t we “think our way out of” our high injury and death rates?

A 10 Year Projection

To get a longer-term view and a stronger sense of the continuing future problem, we can project these Alberta numbers over a 10-year period (2008 to 2018). By multiplying the 2008 numbers from Table 2 by ten years we see the following scenario (10 year period):

Table 3 - Projection

2008 to 2018 (10-year period we are living in)		
Alberta Predictable and Preventable Deaths and Injuries from Hazardous Situations		
Deaths	Hospital Admissions Resulting from Injuries	Emergency Department Visits Resulting from Injuries
17,770	524,000	4,369,350

Do we want to continue to accept this number of deaths (17,770) and hospital admissions resulting from injuries (524,000) over the 10-year time period (2008-2018)? Given this number of deaths in a 10-year period, we are killing all the people in three Alberta communities every ten years. Let’s use the populations of Peace River (6,315), Devon (6,534) and Coaldale (6,943), Alberta to illustrate the problem. Using the population of Peace River, Devon and Coaldale as a basis nearly all of the people in these three Alberta communities would be killed every ten years. Imagine killing nearly all the residents of three Alberta communities the size of Peace River every 10 years! Imagine that we will have hospital emergency department visits resulting from injuries (4,369,350) that are approximately equivalent to four cities the size of metropolitan Edmonton or Calgary! Imagine the huge cost we will pay for these predictable and preventable deaths and injuries through our health care, social support systems, and our own personal family support systems! Imagine the immeasurable sorrow and sadness that family members will experience as a result of 17,770 deaths and 524,000 injuries requiring hospital admission! Imagine the billions in lost revenue to our Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments from fatal injuries, not to mention the huge costs we as taxpayers will pay each year to support the recovery of the injured! With our human and financial resources we have the capability to change the situation. The challenge is like the elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about! I believe we can think our way out of this situation.

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¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ ENFORM, The safety association for Canada's upstream oil and gas industry. *Risk management of Young, New, and Inexperienced Workers*. Retrieved February 7, 2012 from http://ww2.enform.ca/safety_resources/companies/resourcesandtools/greenhands.aspx

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¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ *ibid*

²² 2011 Canadian Federal Budget. Retrieved February 9, 2012 from http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_canadian_federal_budget

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