

America's 10 deadliest jobs

If your work day sometimes seems to consist of nothing but boring meetings, coffee spills and computer glitches, consider yourself lucky.

Each year thousands of U.S. workers die from injuries on the job. In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics' National Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries shows a preliminary total of 4,609 fatal work injuries in 2011, down slightly from the final count of 4,690 in 2010.

The rate of fatal work injury for U.S. workers in 2011 was 3.5 per 100,000 full-time equivalent workers, the same as the initial rate for 2010, and the final rate for 2009 – but that may change. Data just released offer a preliminary count. The final 2011 data will be released in the spring of 2013 and shouldn't be much different. Over the last three years, increases in the published counts based on additional information have averaged 166 fatalities per year, or about 3 percent of the revised total.

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The BLS breaks down the numbers to tell us what the most dangerous professions of all in America are. The top spot on the list goes to fishermen and fisherwomen, who lost their lives at a rate of 121.2 per 100,000 full-time workers. Fishing is a legendarily hazardous occupation, particularly Alaskan shellfishing, and fatalities have been elevated in recent years. High compensation helps offset the risks and seasonal fluctuations that come with the work.

Loggers and airplane pilots had the second and third deadliest jobs, respectively. Both are menaced by the threat of malfunctioning machinery and falling heavy objects. Sixty-four loggers and 72 pilots and flight engineers were killed on the job in 2011.

Some occupations that seem dangerous, like firefighting and tractor operation, are actually relatively safe; both of those jobs, for example, are less dangerous than being a car mechanic. Some of the safest jobs of all, with only three deaths among all full-time workers, include file clerks, insurance sales agents and customer-service representatives.

Forty-one percent of all fatal workplace injuries happened in transportation incidents,

which include car accidents, overturned vehicles and plane crashes. More than half (57 percent) of the 1,898 fatal transportation-related incidents occurred on highways, and involved motorized land vehicles. The second-highest cause of worker fatalities was assaults and violent acts, which accounted for 18 percent of deaths. The preliminary data shows that workplace suicides fell slightly in 2010 to 258 after climbing to a high of 263 the year before.

Violence took the lives of 780 workers last year; with 458 homicides and 242 suicides. Shootings were the most frequent manner of death in both.

Slips, falls and trips killed 666 in 2011, or about 14 percent of all workplace injuries, and a total of 472 workers were fatally injured after being struck by equipment or objects on the job.

Ninety-two percent, or 4,234, of all on-the-job fatalities were among men, and the remaining 8 percent, or 375, were women. This is partly because there are disproportionately more men in dangerous industries like construction and mining. Still, women face their own dangers. More than a quarter of the women who died on the job were involved in roadway incidents, while 21 percent were victims of homicides, compared with only 9 percent for male homicides. That is at least partly because of a concentration of women in workplaces like food and beverage stores, where a majority of all deaths are homicides.

Twenty-six percent of all work fatalities occurred among those between ages 45 and 54. Fatal work injuries among workers ages 20 to 24 increased by 18 percent from last year, to 288. For workers 55 and older, and those under the age of 18, fatal work injustices were down.

The private sector proved more deadly than the public sector, with private industry accounting for 89 percent of fatalities. Within the private sector, transportation and warehousing, and the construction industry saw the largest number deaths, with 711 and 721, respectively. The fall of the housing market has contributed to a large decrease in mortality in construction: Annual fatalities in the industry have fallen by 42 percent since 2006, and are down 7 percent from 2010.

Some predict that the construction industry may never fully recover from the recession — but that could ultimately mean thousands of lives saved. When we look at the numbers by “rate” of fatalities, agriculture, forestry fishing and hunting was the

deadliest industry, with 24.4 deaths per 100,000 full-time workers.

Next time you find yourself complaining about piles of paperwork, obnoxious co-workers and demanding bosses — remember that your work situation could be much worse.

The 10 deadliest jobs:

1. Fishers and related fishing workers
2. Logging workers
3. Aircraft pilot and flight engineers
4. Refuse and recyclable material collectors
5. Roofers
6. Structural iron and steel workers
7. Farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural managers
8. Drivers/sales workers and truck drivers
9. Electrical power-line installers and repairers
10. Taxi drivers and chauffeurs

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