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Fatalities on the Job Fell in 2009

By STEVEN GREENHOUSE

The total number of fatal workplace injuries fell by 17 percent last year, to 4,340, down from 5,214 in 2008, the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) reported on Thursday.

The bureau said that the 2009 total was the smallest since its census of fatal occupational injuries began in 1992 and that the drop far outstripped the 6 percent decline in total hours worked.

The agency noted, however, that the numbers were preliminary and could be revised upward, suggesting that budget constraints at state agencies might have delayed the collecting of information and the reporting of workplace deaths.

Some union officials reacted with skepticism to the report.

“It’s very surprising that there’s such a big drop,” said Bill Kojola, an expert in the [A.F.L.-C.I.O.’s](#) occupational safety department. “I wouldn’t trust these numbers at the present time. It seemed that the state partners that report fatalities have been delayed because they’re strapped for cash.”

The B.L.S. noted that in the previous two years’ reports on workplace fatalities, it eventually added an average of 156 deaths a year to the preliminary total.

According to the bureau, highway incidents were the most frequent cause of fatal workplace injuries,

accounting for 882 deaths, more than 20 percent of the total. Falls were the second most frequent cause, totaling 617, followed by homicides (521) and being struck by an object (414).

Responding to the report, the Labor Secretary, [Hilda L. Solis](#), said in a statement: “A single worker hurt or killed on the job is one too many. While a decrease in the number of fatal work injuries is encouraging, we cannot — and will not — relent from our continued strong enforcement of workplace safety laws.”

The fatality rate was highest for Hispanic workers, 3.7 per 100,000 full-time-equivalent workers. That compared with 3.4 for white workers and 3.0 for African-American workers, the B.L.S. said. The totals were 3,059 fatalities for white workers, 668 for Hispanics, and 407 for blacks.

Fatal injuries in construction fell by 16 percent last year, largely paralleling a 17 percent decline in hours worked in that industry.

Farming, forestry, fishing and hunting was the industrial sector with the highest fatality rate, 26 per 100,000 workers. That compared with 12.7 for mining, 12.1 for transportation and warehousing, 9.7 for construction and 1.1 for finance, insurance and real estate.



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