

**Department of Commerce  
Occupational Safety and Health Program  
Report**



**November 2005**

**Department of Commerce  
Office of Occupational Safety and Health  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Room 5111  
Washington, DC 20230**

**Telephone (202) 482-4935**

## **Executive Summary**

The monthly Occupational Safety and Health report provides an overview of the effectiveness of the Department's Occupational Safety and Health program. The report is based on the latest available data for the Department derived from employee compensation claims and results of bureau evaluations.

Work continues on the accident reporting system for the Department. The accident log for Calendar Year 2004 is partially complete. When completed, Calendar Year 2004 will be the base year for this data. Information is also being added to the Calendar Year 2005. The data is incomplete at this time and a trend analysis can not be done for this report.

The number of workers' compensation claims filed for September was down from the same month of 2004. The total number of claims for Fiscal Year 2005 was also down.

This month's report includes an update on the initiatives to reduce the cost of workers' compensation to the Department. Several initiatives are on-going with more to begin in the next quarter. The focus for this effort is to identify claimants who have the ability to return to work.

Finally in this report is information about the hazards of abusing alcohol. The health section provides information on the problem, facts, and solutions.

## November Report

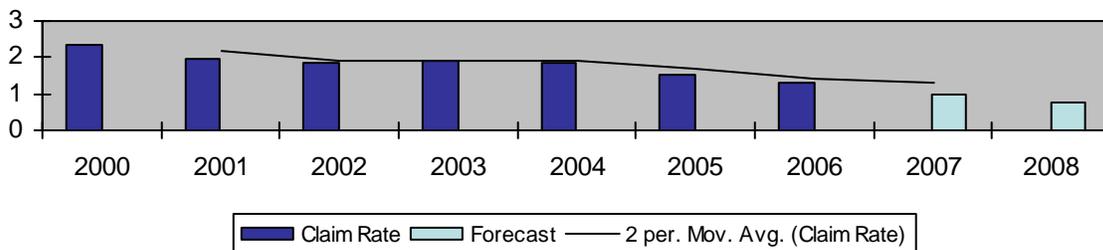
**Purpose.** This report is developed each month to provide information about the effectiveness of the Department's Occupational Safety and Health program. The report is based on the latest available workers' compensation data for the Department derived from employee compensation claims. Wellness information is also provided to assist employees in preparing for the holiday season. The Office of Occupational Safety and Health publicizes the hazards and recommendations in this report using the Department's web page. It will also work with bureau safety offices to further analyze the data and implement recommendations as appropriate for each bureau.

### Discussion.

**Accident Reporting.** The Office of Occupational Safety and Health continues to gather accident data for Calendar Years, 2004 and 2005. The goals are to populate an accident log for the Department for Calendar Year 2004 by December 31, 2005 and for Calendar Year 2005 by February 15, 2006. Accident reports for Calendar Year 2006 will be collected starting January 1, 2006 and will continue through the end of the Calendar Year.

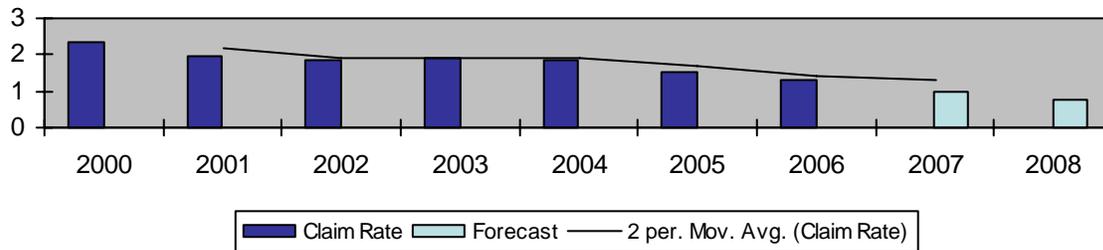
**Recent Accidents and Incidents.** An employee died as a result of injuries sustained in a mid-day vehicle crash. The employee was driving southbound on a divided four lane highway. At an intersection the employee pulled into the turn lane to make a left turn across the two northbound lanes of traffic. For unknown reasons the employee attempted to turn left and drove into the side of a semi-tractor trailer. The car was dragged by the truck for some distance after the impact. The employee was charged with the accident. The northbound semi-tractor trailer had a green traffic light with the right of way. Although all the facts are not known about this accident it does point out the need to yield to on coming traffic before turning left at an intersection. It is important to share information about incidents so that all Department personnel can learn from the lessons and not repeat them.

**Worker's Compensation Claims Analysis.** Workers' Compensation Claim Data tells us that the Monthly Total Recordable Case Incident Rate is down again after an upward trend from June through August of 2005. The October 2005 rate is below the October 2004 rate. Over time the actual rate is inconsistent. The Department objective is to have the actual rate for each month below the trend line. However, in July and August the rate was higher than the trend while in September the rate was the same as the trend, see figure 1.



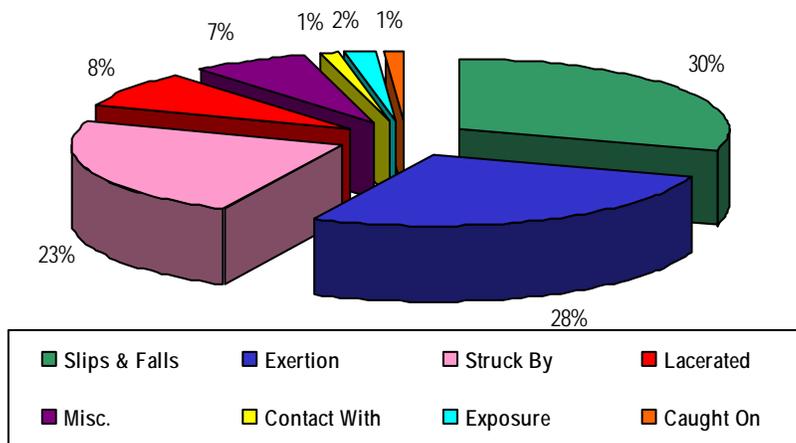
**Figure 1.** Monthly Total Recordable Workers' Compensation Case Incident Rate Trend

The annual Total Case Incidence Rate is down from previous years. The rate for Fiscal Year 2005 is 1.55. The downward trend must continue to an incident rate of half that experienced in Fiscal Year 2005 to 0.76 claims per 100 employees, see figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Total Workers' Compensation Case Incident Rate Trend

Figure 3 shows very little change in the types of accidents that resulted in claims from Fiscal Year 2004 through Fiscal Year 2005. The four main accident types that account for most of the accidents unfortunately are considered to be the most difficult to control and eliminate.



**Figure 3.** Workers' Compensation Claims by type for Fiscal Year 2005.

**Workers Compensation Claims Management Initiatives.** The Office of Occupational Safety and Health continues to implement the overall program improvement plan. The updated project plan is attached to this report. Additional claims have been referred to the Office of Inspector General for investigation. Numerous requests have also been made of the Department of Labor to provide information on cases to enable determinations about returning employees to work.

Work continues by the Office of Occupational Safety and Health on a list of workers' compensation claims with third party involvement. A comparison was made between the Department of Labor Chargeback List and the Social Security Death Rolls. Three claimants who are currently drawing compensation are listed as dead. The Office of Occupational Safety and Health requested the Department of Labor to investigate these claims to identify if the claimant is dead.

The Office of Occupational Safety and Health is behind on the third party review of cases due to the difficulty of identifying those cases that have a third party involvement in the Department of Labor query system. The office is also behind on reviewing 30 case files per week. The average reviewed has been 12. Work continues to correct both these issues and get the plan back on the time line.

**Department of Labor Initiative.** The Department of Labor does not have the year-end data for the Safety, Health and Return-to-Employment (SHARE) Initiative that prevents the Department from determining its success with the goals for Fiscal Year 2005. The Office of Occupational Safety and Health will continue to work with the Department of Labor to get this information.

**Bureau Evaluations.** The Office of Occupational Safety and Health will conduct four bureau evaluations in Fiscal Year 2006. The bureaus that will be evaluated are: Office of Inspector General, Economic Statistics Administration, International Trade Administration, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, and the National Technical Information Service. Dates for the evaluations have not been determined.

**Health and Wellness.** The topic for this month's health and wellness section is "Preventing Alcohol Abuse" and is an important part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

**The Problem.** Alcohol abuse is an intractable problem, and the rate of use remains high, far exceeding the use of other substances. Studies show that the majority of Americans consider drunk driving one of the nation's most important social issues, ahead of healthcare, poverty/hunger, and education. The high rate of alcohol use is the result of many factors, which may include:

- Many people do not consider alcohol to be a drug that can have detrimental affects on its users.
- Drinking alcohol is a part of our culture tied to having a good time (e.g., "happy hour").
- Adults model drinking behavior to young people.
- Adults often deny that alcohol is a problem for youth, consider drinking a "rite of passage" to adulthood, and permit alcohol consumption by youth in their homes.
- Alcohol is accessible to youths in many homes and is also relatively easy for them to purchase.

**The Facts.** There are a great many myths about alcohol abuse but here are some facts.

- Drinking at home is not safer because "Home Poured Drinks" are not standard servings. Safe drinking guidelines are based on a standard drink containing 0.6 ounces of alcohol, but when people drink at home they usually pour larger than standard-sized drinks, according to researchers at the Alcohol Research Group at the Public Health Institute.
- The legal limit for blood alcohol content in Washington, D.C. is 0.08 percent.

- Maryland ranks in the top ten on a list of fifteen states in the country for numbers of fatal traffic accidents involving driving under the influence.
- A driver can be arrested and convicted for driving under the influence at a level below the legal limit.
- The blood alcohol content can continue to rise, even after drinking has stopped.
- The consequence of an arrest and conviction for a first-time drunken driving offense includes up to 90 days in jail, six months license revocation, sky-rocketing insurance rates, and thousands of dollars in fines.
- With sobriety checkpoints, saturation patrols, undercover officers, and concerned citizens the chances of getting caught driving impaired this holiday are very good.

**The Solution.** Preventive measures aimed at reducing alcohol abuse and its consequences include policies and educational interventions.

**Policy Interventions.** Policy Interventions are preventive measures taken to regulate alcohol related behavior. These interventions include:

- Alcohol taxes and prices affect alcohol consumption and consequences. Studies demonstrate that increased beer prices lead to reductions in the levels and frequency of drinking among adults and heavy drinking among youth. Higher taxes on beer are associated with lower traffic crash fatality rates, especially among young drivers.
- Legislation to raise the Minimum Legal Drinking Age (MLDA) is intended to reduce alcohol use among those under 21, to prevent traffic deaths, and to avoid other negative outcomes. Where the MLDA has been raised it has been accompanied by reduced alcohol consumption; traffic crashes, and related fatalities among those under 21.
- The National Highway Systems Act provides incentives for all states to adopt “zero-tolerance” laws that lower the maximum Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) limit for drivers under 21.
- Fourteen states have lowered maximum BAC limits from 0.10 to 0.08 percent to reduce alcohol-related fatal motor vehicles crashes. States that have reduced the limit have experienced a 16 percent decline in the proportion of crashes involving fatally injured drivers whose BAC was 0.08 percent or higher.
- Laws permitting the withdrawal of driving privileges without court action have been adopted by 38 states to prevent traffic crashes caused by unsafe driving practices, including driving with a BAC over the legal limit.
- Alcohol servers are increasingly held liable for injuries and deaths from traffic crashes following irresponsible selling and serving of alcohol.

- The mandated warning label on containers of alcoholic beverages aims to inform and remind drinkers that alcohol consumption can result in birth defects, impaired ability to drive a car or operate machinery, and health problems.

**Educational Interventions.** Behavior is often hard to regulate. Therefore a second approach using Educational Interventions is also used. Educational Interventions are preventive measures that seek to influence drinking through educational methods that will result in the alcohol user drinking responsibly. These interventions include:

- Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) is a program typically taught to 10 and 11 year-old students in grades five and six by police officers. This program is intended to inform young people about alcohol, teach social and decision-making skills, and help students resist the use of alcohol.
- Various 12 step recovery programs have literally helped millions of people since they began in the mid 1930's. These recovery programs are virtually all founded on the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, also known as AA. These recovery programs believe that alcoholism is a disease of both the mind and the body and through the use of group counseling and support a person can control their use of alcohol.
- Server training is mandatory in some states and attempts to educate alcohol servers about the dangers of serving alcohol. The purpose of this training is to alter their serving practices, particularly with underage customers and those who show obvious signs of intoxication. Server training explains the effects of alcohol, applicable laws, how to refuse service to obviously intoxicated patrons, and how to assist customers in obtaining transportation as an alternative to driving.
- Life skill training teaches students in grades seven to nine skills to resist social influences to use alcohol and to enhance general competence and self-esteem.

**Summary.** This holiday season, celebrate responsibly, designate a sober driver, take a taxicab, use mass transit, or you might just be taking a ride to jail. If you drink and drive you lose.

**Future health and wellness topics will include:**

**December 2005** – Exercise

**January 2006** – Stress

**February 2006** – Outdoor Safety

**March 2006** – Water Safety