



Frustratingly, 2016 Workplace Death Rates Increase the Most Since 2010.

Insights

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The newly reported 2016 fatalities occurred under the Obama Administration and their approach of often-punitive Enforcement efforts, so these numbers have nothing to do with the Trump Administration's actions or lack thereof. However, it would also be unfair to blame the numbers solely on the Obama OSHA's efforts. We need to parse the numbers and determine why worker deaths increased, and even more so, why so many workplace deaths still occur. A shift in OSHA approach under Scott Mugno is needed in order to try some new approaches. But more is needed.

Let's not sterilely call these deaths "*the Fatality Rate*;" let's call it what it is ... people dying. 3.6 workers died for every 100,000 full-time equivalent workers, up from 3.4 in 2015.

Across all occupations, 5,190 workers lost their lives in 2016, a seven percent increase from 4,836 deaths in 2015, and the highest number since 2008, when 5,214 workers died. [LINK TO REPORT.](#)

Vehicles.

Look at the number of vehicle-related deaths – a whopping 40% of these deaths were transportation-related. We're talking about 2,083 worker deaths in 2016. The number increased by 29 deaths from 2015, so the bigger issue is not an increase in this area, but the stubbornly high number.

Vehicle deaths are something that OSHA has little control over unless the deaths occur at a construction site, warehouse area or other place than the public roads. Few OSHA standards contemplate driving, and Federal Motor Carrier safety regulations do not cover employees driving pick-up trucks, cars, etc.

Distracted Driving is a huge issue and despite efforts to discourage the use of personal devices while driving by OSHA, the National Safety Council and just about every organization and state legislature, I'm not sure that we are making progress.

The growth of many industries and the increased number of new less skilled workers operating or working around vehicles no doubt contributes to this high number.

Federal Express is solid on developing safe drivers and processes, and OSHA nominee Scott Mugno has focused a great deal of creative energy on driving situational awareness and related issues –

this subject might present an opportunity for him to do real good.

Similarly, struck-by on construction sites, in warehouses and dock areas remain a problem and with few regulations, this is an area where employers should not be complacent.

Demographics

Among age and demographic groups, only Hispanic workers saw a decrease in fatalities, and that may partly be because that number was so high. It's not the time to ease efforts to better train and manage workers whose native language may not be English, and who may present varying levels of literacy.

Construction.

My construction clients are not and never will be satisfied with the number of workers killed in construction, but at least the increase from 937 to 991 did not increase from the unacceptable 10.1 workers killed for every 100,000 full-time equivalent workers.

Based on the shortage of skilled and unskilled workers facing the robust construction industry, hopefully these numbers reflect concrete steps already taken to better train employees, monitor and manage safety, and make safety a genuine core value for managers from foremen to the executive suite.

Shootings, Overdoses, Suicides

I will quote excerpts from a piece in Bloomberg BNA's Occupational Safety and Health Reporter by the always good Bruce Rolfson on December 19:

Among all workers, a growing number of deaths were attributed to homicides, suicides, and unintentional drug overdoses, the BLS numbers show.

Homicides increased 20 percent from 2015's 417 deaths, reaching 500 fatalities in 2016. Of those 2016 deaths, 394 were attributed to shootings, up 11 percent.

Suicides grew 27 percent, reaching 291 deaths in 2016. There were 229 workplace suicides in 2015.

Unintentional drug overdose deaths increased 32 percent, rising from 165 in 2015 to 217 for 2016.

Kenneth Kolosh, who oversees the National Safety Council's statistics efforts, said the drug overdose increase is part of a wider societal trend in which drug overdose deaths increased by about 25 percent annually, reaching 52,404 in 2015.

What the Bureau of Labor Statistics workplace overdose numbers don't show is the impact of increasing drug use on injuries and as contributing factor in deaths, Kolosh said.

The triad of abused prescription pain meds, Black Tar Heroin, and the residual effects of off-duty marijuana use will almost certainly increasingly contribute to a wide range of injuries and deaths

marijuana use will almost certainly increasingly contribute to a wide range of injuries and deaths. As we have said many times, the Opiates Crisis and the Declining Health of U.S. Workers will be the most significant and costly safety issues facing U.S. business.

An Underfunded OSHA.

The Obama Administration alienated employers by many of its OSHA policies, but these issues do not diminish the need for an effective OSHA. OSHA, unlike many other employee-related Agencies, undeniably does much good work. Sure, the punitive approach, public shaming of employers, and shift of resources to whistleblower efforts at the expense of core safety enforcement ticked off many employers. But don't assume that the career OSHA employees were all on board with these steps - most of them just want to see employees go home unhurt at night. Many, if not most employer-side people like me will tell you that a 20% or 30% budget increase would not be an unreasonable sum to add Compliance Officers, improve training, and bring OSHA's labs and technical capacity out of the 70s.

Instead, the Senate committee is recommending that OSHA receive \$552.8 million for fiscal year 2018, the same inadequate sum as in 2017. The House is proposing an absurdly low \$531.5 million for OSHA in 2018.

And currently, with the proposed budgets, I see no way that OSHA can restore the consultation efforts savaged by the past Administration and desired by employers and employees alike.

Howard