

News Statement



U.S. Department of Labor
Office of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.
Release Number: 10-1573-NAT

For Immediate Release
Nov. 9, 2010
Contact: Jason Surbey Diana Petterson
Phone: 202-693-4668 202-693-1898
E-mail: surbey.jason@dol.gov petterson.diana@dol.gov

Statement by US Labor Department's OSHA assistant secretary regarding data on occupational injuries, illnesses requiring days away from work in 2009

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics today announced that the number of reported nonfatal occupational injury and illness cases that required days away from work to recuperate decreased by nine percent to 1,238,490 cases in 2009 for private industry, state government and local government. Additionally, BLS reported that the total incidence rate decreased by 5 percent to 117 cases per 10,000 full-time workers. BLS also reported that local and state government workers had much higher rates of injuries and illnesses requiring days away from work than workers in private industry. In response, Dr. David Michaels, assistant secretary of labor for occupational safety and health, issued this statement:

“Injuries and illnesses requiring time away from work to recuperate can be costly to both employers and employees alike, often resulting in lost productivity for employers and lost wages for workers. All employers, private and government, can use the data released today to focus on areas with high incidence rates, and find and fix hazards to prevent future occurrences. We are continuing our efforts to ensure that these data are complete and accurate, so that they will assist employers in that effort.

“The BLS report is significant in that, for the first time, it reports incidence rates for workers in state and local governments, half of whom work in states where public employees have no OSHA coverage. We find it very troubling to note that the rate among local and state government workers was 185 cases and 180 cases per 10,000 full-time workers, respectively. That compares with 106 cases per 10,000 full-time employees in private industry. Specifically, we see a high occurrence among many public employee occupations, particularly among transit and intercity bus drivers, law enforcement officers, emergency response workers, and nursing aides and orderlies. We are also concerned that musculoskeletal disorders continue for the second year in a row to comprise almost 30 percent of all workplace injuries and illnesses requiring time away from work.

“Although it is encouraging to see a reduction in the total number of days away from work for injuries and illnesses suffered by workers in 2009, we know that economic conditions may have weighed heavily on the decline. Specifically, a decrease in employment and total hours worked, especially in construction and manufacturing, has led to fewer workers exposed to safety and health hazards in the workplace.

“As the economy improves, more Americans back on the job could potentially lead to easily preventable work-related injuries and illnesses. OSHA's challenge, and therefore America's challenge, is to remain vigilant and keep the health and safety of America's workers a priority, for no job is a good job unless it's a safe job.”

###

U.S. Department of Labor releases are accessible on the Internet at <http://www.dol.gov>. The information in this news release will be made available in alternate format (large print, Braille, audio tape or disc) from the COAST office upon request. Please specify which news release when placing your request at 202-693-7828 or TTY 202-693-7755. The Labor Department is committed to providing America's employers and employees with easy access to understandable information on how to comply with its laws and regulations. For more information, please visit <http://www.dol.gov/compliance>.