U.S. Workplace Deaths Spike – Third Consecutive Year: OSHA Resources Shrinking

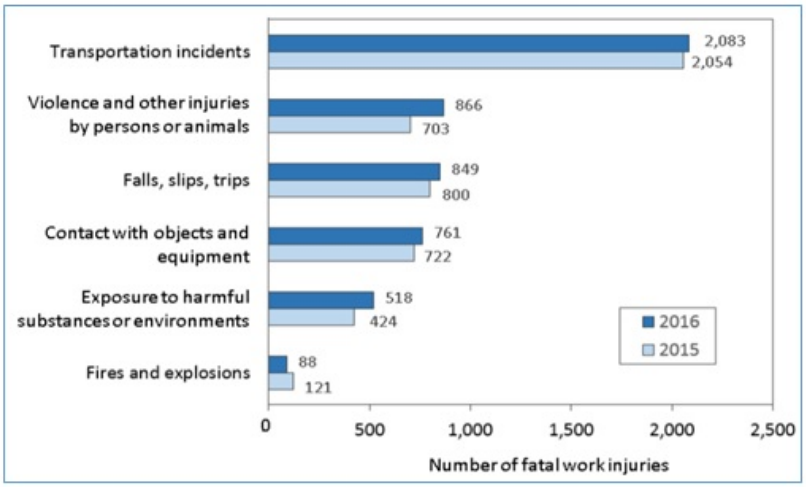
The Loss

5,190. That's how many workers lost their lives in 2016 to fatal work injuries, an average of 14 people a day. This is a **7% increase** from the 4,836 fatal injuries in 2015, according to a recent report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

This is also the **third consecutive increase** in annual workplace fatalities and the first time more than 5,000 fatalities have been recorded by the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) since 2008.

Type of Incident

Fatal Occupational Injuries by Major Event – 2015-2016



- Transportation incidents remained most common fatality cause in 2016 at 40% (2,083).
- Violence and injuries by persons or animals up 23% - 2nd most common fatality cause.
- Exposure to harmful substances or environments up 22%.
- Good news - fires and explosions down 27 %.

Other Concerns

The increase in worker deaths isn't the only thing to be concerned about. Budget and staffing cuts at OSHA over the last few years and more cuts proposed by Congress for 2018, are also cause for concern.

Why? These reductions mean less federal oversight, inspections, enforcement, and support for employers and workers. The effects of the cuts and loss of inspectors and staff, could last for years – even if the budget allows for rehiring or hiring new/additional inspectors and staff in the coming few years.

Peg Seminario, AFL-CIO Director of Occupational Safety and Health, offered this insight, "Federal OSHA now has fewer than 800 inspectors and can inspect workplaces on average only once every 159 years. OSHA's budget has declined since 2010 and been frozen for years…Fewer resources and less oversight will mean more injuries and workplace deaths. Workers need more safety and health protection, not less."

For comparison, Seminario also noted in areas where OSHA concentrates money, staff and inspections, death rates stayed stable or dropped. But growing economic sectors "which receive little attention and oversight," such as health care and food services, saw jumps in death rates on the job. "The same is true for groups of workers that lack OSHA protection, including state and local government employees and many agriculture workers," she noted.

Call to Action

So, what does all this mean for "safety people"? Safety managers and anyone responsible for safety, have always had their work cut out for them when it comes to doing more with less – and our role and the need for strong safety and health leadership is needed even more now.

It means we must fill in the void left by deceased federal support, as we have done in the past when a change in administration changes OSHA's focus and resources. It means we must be even more diligent with our inspections, hazard assessments, corrective actions, and training. It means using our resources smartly, keeping in contact or making connections with, other "safety people" to share ideas and lessons learned. Finally, it means to keep on doing what we been called to do; keep our workers safe and healthy.

https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cfoi.pdf