

Workplace Fatalities on the Rise Again

Effective and Robust Enforcement Needed to Save Lives on the Job

As the year-end fiscal debate looms, a jump in Latino occupational fatalities should remind lawmakers of the human cost of cuts to vital worker protection programs in a rapidly evolving economy.

Latino Employment Statistics for September 2012

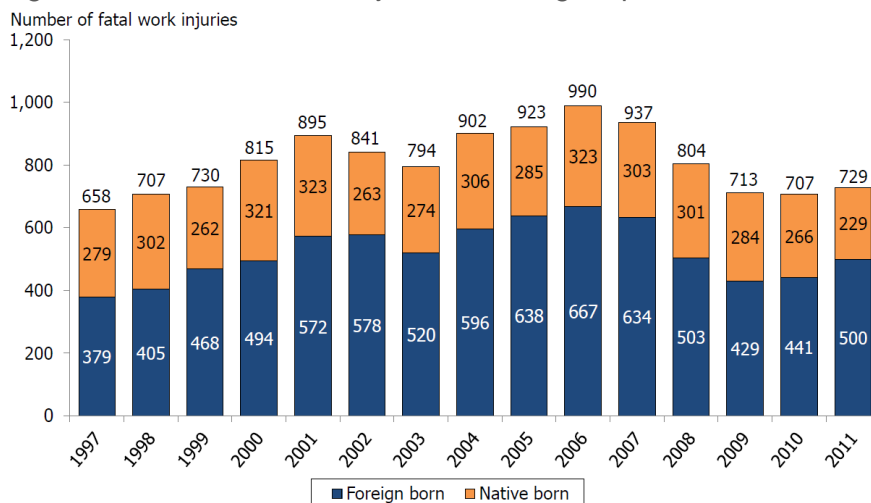
The [latest report](#) from the U.S. Department of Labor showed that the unemployment rate declined from 8.2% to 7.8% as U.S. employers added 114,000 jobs in August. The Latino unemployment rate also fell by 0.3 points to 9.9%. The Hispanic labor force participation rate, 66.2%, is nearly three points higher than that of the total workforce.

Workplace Fatalities among Latinos Increased in 2011

New data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that the number of Latinos who lost their lives due to workplace injuries increased in 2011. Below are highlights from the [Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries](#), which collects fatality data from a range of private and government sources across the country. These data are preliminary and will be finalized in Spring 2013.

The number of Latinos killed on the job increased for the first time since 2006, but the Latino fatality rate was unchanged. In 2011, 729 Hispanic workers died from an occupational injury, compared to 707 workers in 2010 (see chart below). While the number of Latino fatalities increased in 2011, the Latino fatality rate was unchanged from 2010 at 3.9 deaths per 100,000 workers. The national fatality rate was 3.5.

Figure 1. Number of Fatal Injuries Involving Hispanic or Latino Workers, 1997–2011*



Fatal work injuries involving Hispanic or Latino workers increased in 2011 after four consecutive years of decline. Sixty-nine percent of fatally-injured Hispanic or Latino workers in 2011 were born outside of the United States.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, [Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries](#) (accessed October 5, 2012).

* Data from 2011 are preliminary. Data for prior years are revised and final. Data from 2001 exclude fatal work injuries resulting from the September 11 terrorist attacks.

The foreign-born share of fatally-injured Latinos was the highest in five years.

Approximately 69% of the Latino workers killed on the job in 2011 were born outside of the United States. While immigrant workers have typically accounted for the majority of Latino occupational fatality victims, 2011 was the first year since 2005 that immigrant workers accounted for 69% or more of Latino fatalities.

Employment growth explains some, but not all, of the increase in the number of Latinos killed on the job. More people at work since the end of the recession could explain the rise in Latino fatalities. However, the number of fatalities for the total population actually declined between 2010 and 2011 even though employment rose.

A rise in fatalities in landscaping services likely contributed to the increase in Latino fatalities. In 2011, 167 workers in landscaping services were killed on the job, up from 133 workers in 2010. [Latinos represent 43.7% of landscaping workers](#), while making up 14.5% of the total employed workforce. At the occupational level, tree trimmers and pruners experienced the largest increase in fatalities. Falls, slips, and trips were the leading cause of death in landscaping services, followed by contact with objects and equipment.

The fatality rate declined in construction, a hazardous industry with large Latino representation. Construction fatalities continued a five-year decline. The sluggish housing market is not the only factor driving this decline, since the rate of deaths also declined from 9.8 to 8.9 deaths per 100,000 workers. This is good news for Latino workers, who represent 24.4% of construction workers.

Policy Responses to Prevent Fatal Workplace Injuries

The 2011 Latino fatality figures should serve as a human reminder to policymakers and regulators to strengthen, rather than undermine, laws and regulations that protect workers on the job. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the federal agency responsible for enforcing and strengthening workplace safety standards, is in dire need of funding and reform to enable it to be more nimble and effective in the twenty-first century economy. With a meager \$500 million budget, OSHA under the Obama administration has succeeded in hiring hundreds of additional workplace inspectors, targeting enforcement to high-violation industries, and improving prevention outreach to workers around common hazards like [heat illness](#) and [falls in construction](#). However, OSHA's reach remains limited; in 2010, there were only [7.3 OSHA inspectors for every million workers](#). Vulnerable workers are further threatened by the end-of-year fiscal debate, in which cuts to OSHA's budget could total [\\$46 million](#) if sequestration proceeds.

OSHA's resources shortage could be partially alleviated through reforms to the agency itself. OSHA should maximize its resources by working with employers and community leaders to find creative ways to reach vulnerable workers, such as immigrants and those in temporary employment agreements. These workers face significant [barriers to reporting](#) workplace hazards. Better training and a system for referring complaints via community-based organizations and workers' committees could build on the Obama administration's efforts to strengthen whistleblower protection, ultimately preventing injuries and protecting workers.

Finally, lawmakers must act to strengthen OSHA's authority to regulate rapidly evolving industries, such as [poultry processing](#), and strengthen the agency's ability to crack down on repeat bad actors, who currently consider the agency's weak fines and legal recourse a cost of business rather than a deterrent from breaking the law. Protecting workers from deadly injuries at work requires serious consideration of these and [other important legal and regulatory reforms](#).

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