



NEWS RELEASE

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Workplace Fatalities Drop in 2009

RALEIGH—Figures released today by the N.C. Department of Labor show that accidental workplace fatalities dropped from 57 in 2008 to 34 in 2009, a 40 percent drop.

“The good news is fewer people died on the job in 2009 than at any other time in our state’s history,” Labor Commissioner Cherie Berry said. “However, the only acceptable number is zero.”

One of the state’s most hazardous industries, manufacturing, dropped from nine fatalities in 2008 to eight in 2009. Construction fatalities dropped from 17 in 2008 to 14 in 2009.

“Our resounding message to employers and employees during this economic downturn has been not to cut corners with safety programs,” Commissioner Berry said. “They are listening and deserve credit for helping make North Carolina’s workplaces safer.”

The fatality rate for construction per 100,000 workers over the past four years has decreased from 9.00 in 2006 to 6.98 in 2009.

“We know that construction work was down last year,” said Allen McNeely, director of the NCDOL Occupational Safety and Health Division. “To get a true gauge of how employers are doing, we look at the rate that fatalities are occurring, which takes into consideration the fluctuations in the workforce. While we may have had fewer working, the work being performed is still extremely hazardous. We are encouraged by the fact that the fatality rate is decreasing.”

The latest U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics figures show private industry currently has a record low injury and illness rate in North Carolina—3.4 injured workers for every 100 full-time employees in 2008. North Carolina’s injury and illness rate has steadily improved, breaking through the 4.0 ceiling that stood for 2005 and 2006 to fall to 3.7 in 2007 and to 3.4 in 2008. North Carolina is one of only 14 states with an injury and illness rate lower than the national average of 3.9 in 2008, the last year of record.

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“The fact that we are seeing a reduction in the rate that injuries and fatal accidents are occurring is encouraging,” Commissioner Berry said. “We will continue partnering with employers and employees to create a safety culture that emphasizes education and training.”

Fatalities in the service industry dropped from eight fatalities in 2008 to six in 2009, and agriculture, forestry and fishing fatalities dropped from seven in 2008 to two in 2009.

There were no work-related fatalities in 77 of North Carolina’s 100 counties. Wake County experienced the most fatalities with six, followed by Hyde County with four. Three counties had two fatalities. They were Mecklenburg, Robeson and Rockingham. There were 18 counties that experienced one fatality.

Whites accounted for 17 of the 34 workplace deaths. Hispanics accounted for 10. Blacks accounted for six, and American Indians for one. Men accounted for 31 of the 34 workplace fatalities.

The leading cause of the work-related fatalities was falls with nine fatalities, followed by eight fatalities due to explosions. Five workers were crushed by objects, and five were struck by objects. Three workers were electrocuted. Four workers died in other fatal events.

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