

MASSACHUSETTS WORKPLACE FATALITIES – REPORT SAY, AVOIDABLE IF PROPER SAFEGUARDS IN PLACE



The Loss of Life and Limb in Massachusetts Workplaces Report states that 58 workers died on the job and an estimated 580 additional workers died from their occupation related diseases and an alarmingly high, 50,000 workers were seriously injured. According to the report, Massachusetts' rate of workplace deaths has shown no significant trend over the last 20 years, to monitor increase or decrease in fatalities with any degree of accuracy. Compared to the 58 who lost their lives in 2011, 47 had lost their lives in the preceding year and 62 in 2009. Marcy Goldstein-Gelb, executive director of the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health, who co-authored the report with Western Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health said, "What's most distressing about the findings in, Dying for Work, is the number of preventable accidents that are claiming the lives of so many hard working men and women every year. More disturbing still is that many of these accidents are similar to the accidents that killed workers the year before, and the year before that." The report suggests that occupational deaths caused by diseases contracted owing to workplace exposures far outnumbered deaths caused by workplace accidents. More than a fifth of the fatalities were caused in falls, while accidents involving motor vehicles caused the untimely death of 12 employees. Violence at the workplace also accounted for 6 deaths. In the last report the construction-industry topped the list as the most dangerous work-environment but fire-fighting took over as the deadliest and most dangerous profession. From 5 deaths in 2010, it increased to 13 in 2011, accounting for 22 percent of all workplace fatalities. Most people understand that fire-fighting by nature is a dangerous job, but of the 13 who died, only 3 died while fighting the fire. 10 died owing to cancer or heart-disease caused by inhaling chemicals and toxic fumes released during the fire. Jeff Newton, membership and communications coordinator for MassCOSH, said, "Not long ago, we were seeing many cases of black lung and white lung. There are still certain professions where there are exposures that can lead to these and other complications. It's not just work-place fatalities, but illnesses. Cancer is a disease commonly associated with fire-fighting." The average age of the employees, whose lives were curtailed in their prime, was 49. One of the major problems was the hiring done by temporary agencies. These jobs require more physical strength and less of skills and are done by migrants, who have little or no knowledge of English. "There is a pool of labor with limited English skills seeking employment in low-skilled jobs," Newton said. "They are targeted by temp agencies that seek profit over all else. They realize they can bully them around." They are exposed to risky and unsafe work surroundings and they are afraid to oppose their employers for fear of being dismissed. A stricter implementation of proposed safety rules would go a long way in keeping the work environment safe. "An Act to Promote Public Health through Workplace Safety for Social Workers," House Bill 592 and Senate Bill 1206 would require workers who worked in isolated situations, to send an emergency signal through a device that alerted the authorities to impending danger. It was indeed ironic that Massachusetts did not have OSHA protection for its state employees. "OSHA has been responsible for a fantastic reduction in workplace fatalities and injuries," Newton said. The report is released annually to try and understand the causes of the deaths and to frame and implement procedures that ensure that they are not repeated and to, as the authors of the report say "renew our commitment to the fight for safe jobs." The Massachusetts AFL-CIO, MassCOSH and Western MassCOSH stressed the need for "strengthened OSHA regulations, protections for immigrant workers, toxic chemical regulation improvements, comprehensive worksite safety programs and more." The report in addition to providing facts and figures also pays their respects to those who passed away, by including their photos and tributes in the report.