

Alaska Loggers Face High Risk of Injury

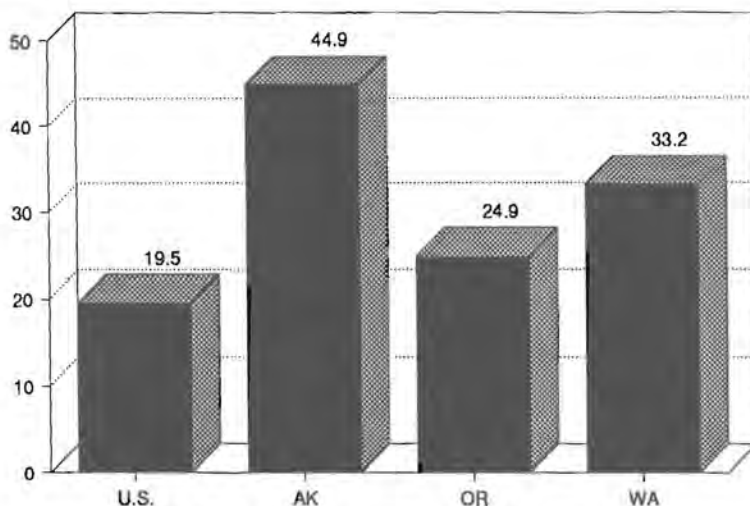
by James Wilson

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Alaska's wood products industry includes logging, sawmills and

Figure • 1

OSHA Case Rates/100 Workers Logging 1989



Source: Alaska Department of Labor, Research and Analysis Section.

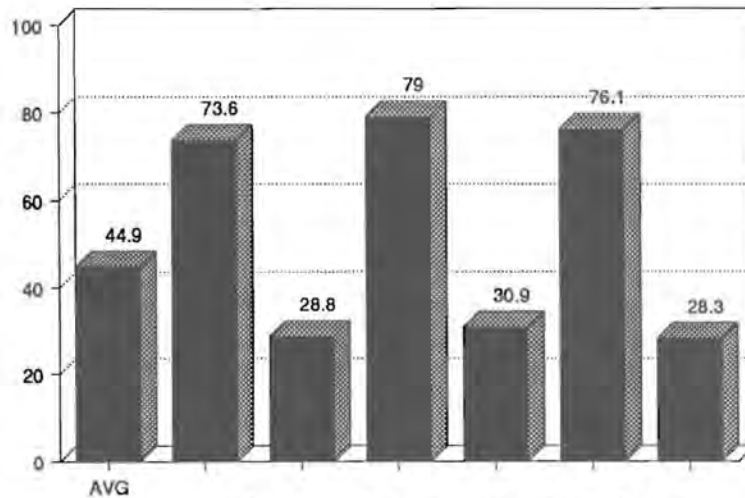
planing mills, pulp mills and related products. These forest product businesses account for only 2.5% of statewide private sector employment. 10.5% of all time loss injury and illness cases reported to the Alaska Division of Workers' Compensation, however, are from workers employed in these companies.

Worker safety issues are familiar topics within the wood products industry. Industry employers spend considerable time and money on safety programs. The Alaska Pulp Company recently estimated that it spends about one million dollars annually on safety

OSHA Case Rates of Injury and Illness in 6 Big Firms in 1989 OSH Survey Logging

programs, resulting in improvements in its safety record. Portions of the forest products industry, however, are among the most hazardous in the state as well as the nation. The incidence rate for Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) recordable injuries and illnesses in Alaska's logging industry during 1989 was 44.9 cases per 100 workers. The private sector average was 12.3.

Traditionally, logging holds the unfortunate distinction as Alaska's highest incidence rate industry. Logging in Alaska is inherently more hazardous than in some other states because of the difficulties created by harsh weather, steep and heavily grown terrain, the large size of trees, and methods which must be used to harvest them. (See Figure 1.)



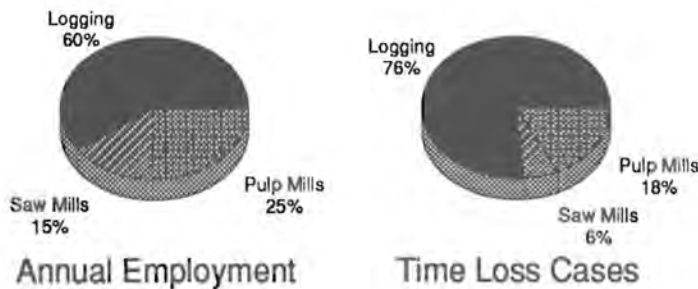
Source: Alaska Department of Labor, Research and Analysis Section.

Incidence Rates Vary Widely Among Logging Firms

The logging industry's average incidence rate of 44.9 cases per 100 workers represents a broad spectrum of logging companies. Some of the larger companies reporting data for the 1989 OSHA survey had rates well below the average. (See Figure 2.) A few had rates considerably higher, over 70 cases per 100. The good news for the industry is that the 1989 rate was the lowest recorded in five years.

Preliminary data for 1990 shows annual employment in logging at

Alaska Wood Products Industries 1989 Employment & TL Cases



Source: Alaska Department of Labor, Research and Analysis Section.

the same level as in 1989 with the number of reported Workers' Compensation time loss cases down 20%. Whether the OSHA recordable case rate will continue to decline remains to be seen. One very noteworthy improvement is that there was only one reported logging injury fatality in 1990, compared to an average of 5 deaths a year for the past few years.

The sawmill & planing mill industry make up the smallest component of Alaska's forest products processors. Annual average employment in 1989 was 564. No published incidence rate of OSHA recordable cases exist in this industry because of its smaller size. The data do reveal, however, that the OSHA case rate is roughly one-half that of logging.

Pulp mill companies are Alaska's largest manufacturers of forest products. The paper and allied products industry annual employment has risen each year since 1982 with a 3% growth rate from 1988 to 1989. The number of reported Workers' Compensation time loss cases was nearly identical in 1988 and 1989 (195 cases). One difficulty in using the time loss cases data for these companies is that it includes their logging activities, which are more hazardous than pulp processing.

Due to confidentiality requirements, the Alaska Department of Labor does not publish an OSHA recordable case rate for Alaska's pulp mill industry. Data from the Pacific Coast Association of Pulp and Paper Manufacturers do contain some good news regarding Alaska's pulp mills. According to this industry source, the Sitka mill ranked 10th best out of 45 west coast mills, and the Ketchikan mill also placed in the top half. The association's 1990 data allows us to compute a pulp mill industry rate for Alaska of 7.4 OSHA recordable cases per 100 workers. This rate falls well below the historic Alaska private industry average; it is lower than the rates for some less hazardous industries such as retail trade.

Conclusion

At first blush, Alaska's forest products industry appears among the most hazardous for Alaskan workers. Closer examination reveals a variety of injury risk ranging from extremely high to very low. The logging industry is the most hazardous place for Alaskans to work; however, that varies dramatically by employer. Alaska's pulp mills are among the safest places for working Alaskans, while sawmills fall in between these two extremes.

1990 Census Bulletin

The Alaska State Data Center released population counts by race from the 1990 census in March. The count in Alaska showed that all racial categories gained population in the past decade as the state grew from 401,851 people in 1980 to 550,043 in 1990.

Both White and Native racial groups made up smaller percentages of the total population than they did in 1980. The Asian and Pacific Islander category grew by the largest percentage. The Black population also grew at a faster rate than the state as a whole.

People of Hispanic origin are spread across all the racial groups, but were also tallied separately in the 1990 census. The percentage of Hispanics grew from 2.4% in 1980 to 3.2% in 1990.

The U.S. Census Bureau, the original source of this count, has cautioned that this data could be adjusted later for over- or undercounts no later than July 15, 1991.

Race	1990 Population	1990 Percent	1980 Percent
White	415,492	75.5	77.1
Native American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut	85,698	15.6	16.0
Black	22,451	4.1	3.4
Asian or Pacific Islander	19,728	3.6	2.0
Other Race	6,674	1.2	1.6
Total Population	550,043	100.0	100.0

Source: Alaska Department of Labor, Research and Analysis Section.

(For more information on the 1990 census, see page 13)