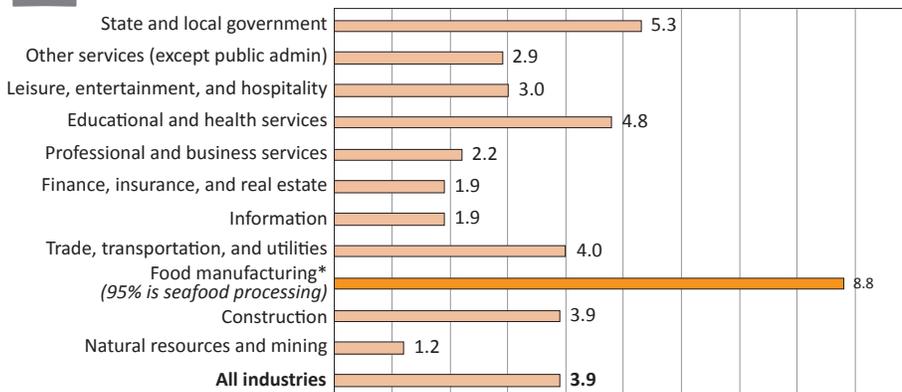


# The Highest Injury Rates

## Among Alaska industries, seafood processing tops the list

### 1 Injury Rate Highest in Seafood Processing

INCIDENTS PER 100 WORKERS BY ALASKA INDUSTRY, 2016



\*Alaska injury and illness data can't be narrowed further than food manufacturing. See Exhibit 2 below.  
Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses

By KOLE KOSKI

Commercial fishing in Alaska has long been known as dangerous work, thanks in part to popular reality TV shows such as *The Deadliest Catch*. The hazards of processing the catch are less well known, but seafood processing has the highest injury and illness rate of any Alaska industry, among those the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics tracks.<sup>1</sup> (See Exhibit 1.)

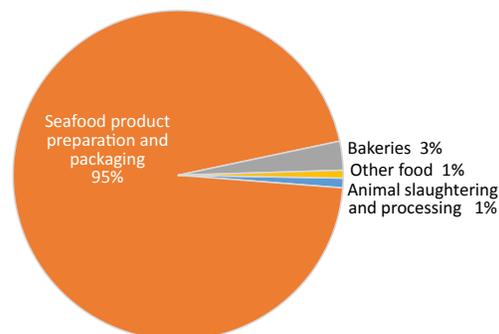
Processing workers are often on the “slime line,” where they cut or filet fish as it moves down an assembly line. Other common tasks include loading and unloading seafood into totes, stacking and moving the products in freezers, and packing and loading seafood into boxes and preparing them for shipment.

Like their harvesting counterparts, seafood processors face some of the harshest working conditions in the state: a constantly wet and slick work area, cold temperatures, knives and other sharp objects, forklifts and freight hauling equipment, and processing machinery with sharp blades and pinching gear mechanisms — all operating quickly and in a busy environment. They also work long hours during fishing season — sometimes 14 to 16 hours a day, seven days a week.

<sup>1</sup>BLS doesn't track illness and injury rates for commercial fishing.

### 2 Alaska Food Manufacturing Mostly Seafood Processing

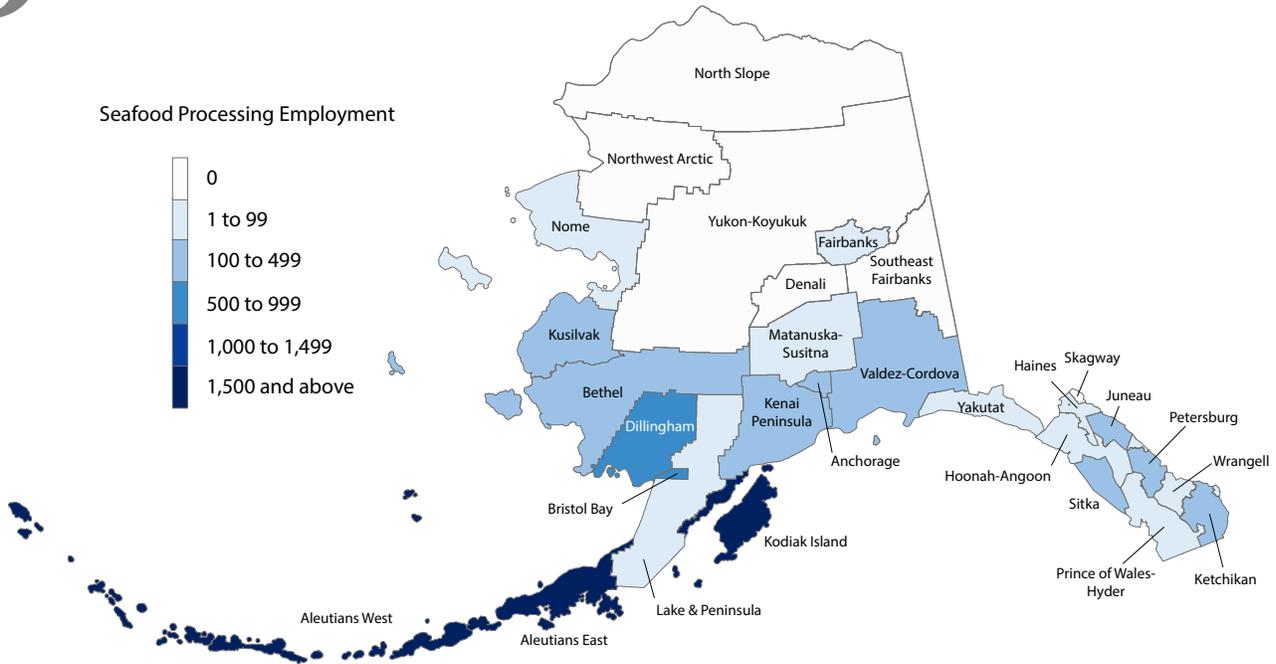
EMPLOYMENT BY FOOD TYPE, 2016



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

# 3 Seafood Processing Jobs Concentrated in Aleutians, Kodiak

## EMPLOYMENT BY BOROUGH OR CENSUS AREA, 2016



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

### Nearly 10,000 jobs, largely in Southwest and Kodiak

Alaska had about 9,814 seafood processing jobs in 2016, with the most in the Aleutians followed by Kodiak. (For more on Aleutians East and its large seafood processing workforce, see page 11.)

Processing workers are spread throughout the state, however, with at least some working in most boroughs and census areas. (See Exhibit 3.)

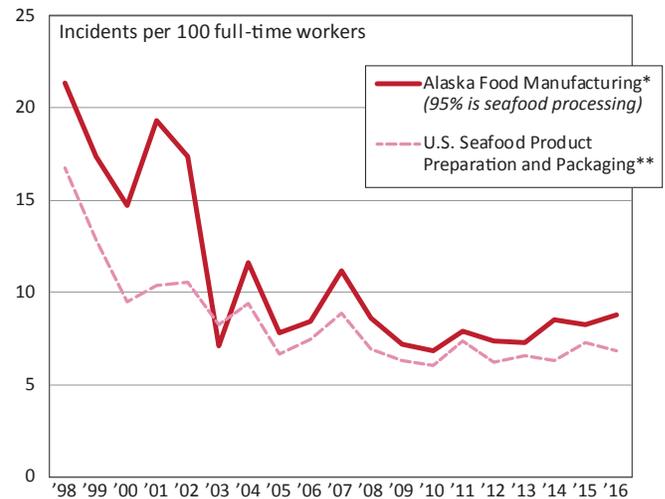
### Injury rate more than twice Alaska's industry average

In Alaska, the rate of 8.8 injuries or illnesses for every 100 full-time workers in the food manufacturing industry — 95 percent of which is seafood processing — is more than double the rate for all Alaska industries (3.9 per 100).

It's also more than one-and-a-half times the national average for food manufacturing (4.7), although seafood processing represents a tiny slice of food manufacturing nationwide. Narrowing the U.S. category to seafood product preparation and packaging shows a smaller gap, at 6.8 incidents per 100 workers for the

# 4 Injuries Down Since '90s

## ALASKA AND U.S., 1998 TO 2016



\*Alaska injury and illness data can't be narrowed further than food manufacturing.

\*\*Before 2003, U.S. data were separated into fresh/frozen and canned seafood processing. As most national jobs were in the fresh/frozen category and it isn't statistically valid to combine the two, we used the national fresh/frozen incident rate for 1998 through 2002.

Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses

U.S. (See Exhibit 4.)

While Alaska’s rate has inched up in recent years, it’s less than half of what it was in the late 1990s. The comparable national rate has seen a similar decline.

Likely factors in the decreasing incident rates are improved workplace safety procedures and protocols, better training, and technological advancements in seafood processing equipment.

## Most common accidents and injuries

The two most common causes of injuries for Alaska manufacturing workers are “contact with objects” followed by “overexertion.”

Examples in the first category include being cut by a slipping knife or dropping a box of frozen fish on a foot. Overexertion injuries are caused by lifting, lowering, pushing, or pulling — for example,



Workers process salmon in Juneau. Photo courtesy of Flickr user Gillfoto

muscle strains from moving heavy carts or boxes. (See Exhibit 5.)

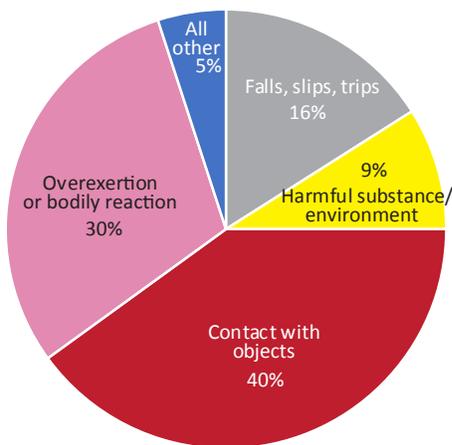
In third is “falls, slips, and trips,” which are common on a fish slime-covered floor. This category also includes accidents such as falling off a raised production line or tripping over a water hose.

As exhibit 6 shows, the most common resulting injuries are sprains and strains, followed by general soreness or pain. The largest category is “all other,” however, which is largely infections and other illnesses but includes burns, amputations, tendonitis, and carpal tunnel syndrome.

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## 5 Typical Accidents in Manufacturing\*

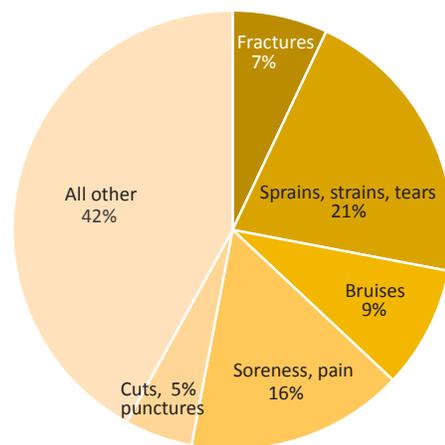
CAUSE OF INJURY, 2016



\*About 72 percent of manufacturing in Alaska is seafood processing.  
Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses

## 6 Sprains, Strains Among Most Common Injuries

MANUFACTURING INJURIES,\* 2016



\*About 72 percent of manufacturing in Alaska is seafood processing.  
Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses