

Work Related Injuries: A Statistical Highlight of 1984

By James Wilson

The Alaska Department of Labor collects and summarizes data on injuries and illnesses incurred by workers in Alaska's labor force. The data is based on reports filed to the Alaska Division of Workers' Compensation by employers and on an annual survey to collect information that employers maintain under the requirements of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA). An annual report for injuries in 1984 is now available. This article presents a brief summary of information contained in the annual report.

Definitions

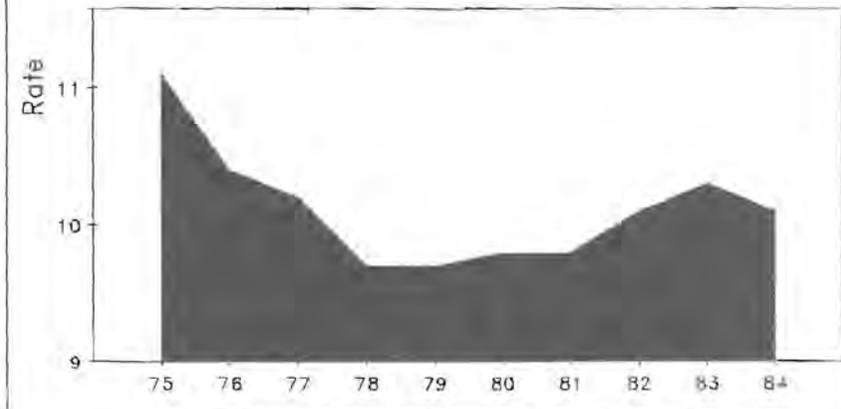
Unless otherwise stated the injury and illness rate referred to will mean the total number of OSHA recordable injury and illness cases per 100 full-time workers. Rates are developed for the type of case (injury, illness, injury and illness) and extent of case (lost workday cases, non-time-loss cases, total cases). Lost workday cases are those resulting in one or more days away from work or one or more days of restricted activity. Non-time-loss cases are those where no work time is lost by the employee beyond the day of injury.

1984 Injury/Illness Rate

The 1984 Alaska occupational injury and illness rate for the private sector was 10.3 cases per 100 workers. This is a decline from the 1983 rate of 10.6, which was the highest in recent years. The private sector rate of 10.3 is the sum of the injury case rate and the illness case rate. The 1984 injury case rate (10.1) declined from the seven year high (10.3) recorded in 1983 while the illness case rate (0.2) decreased to the level recorded in 1981-1982.

	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84
Total	11.5	10.7	10.4	10.0	10.1	10.4	10.0	10.3	10.6	10.3
Injury	11.1	10.4	10.2	9.7	9.7	9.8	9.8	10.1	10.3	10.1
Illness	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2

Alaska Private Sector 1975-1984 INJURIES INCIDENCE RATE

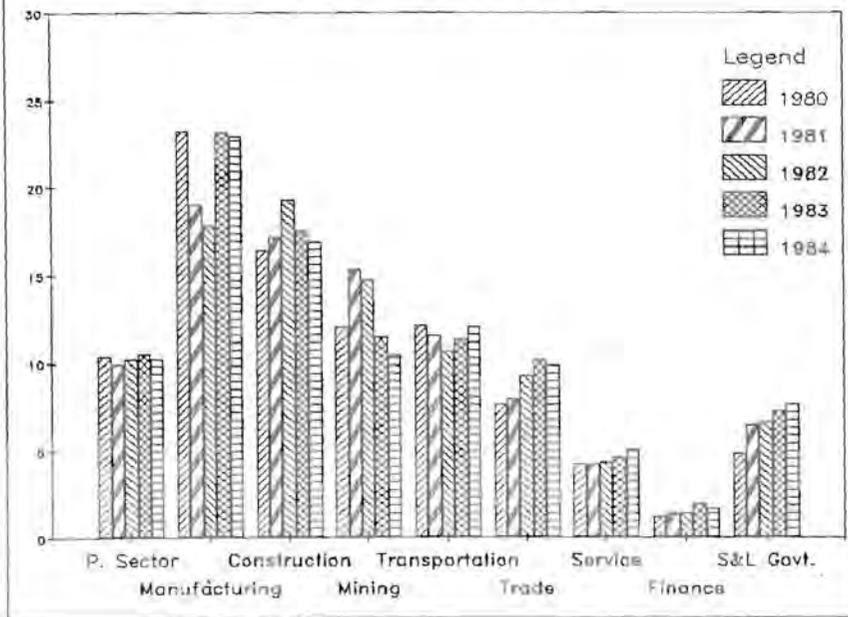


Time Loss Cases

The 1984 incidence rate for lost workday cases in the private sector (4.5) was the lowest recorded to date. The lost workday case rate declined in most major industry divisions. In construction the 1984 lost workday case rate equaled the record low set in 1980 while mining recorded a record low time loss case rate. The non-time-loss case rate rose slightly from 5.7 to 5.8 cases per 100 workers. An average of 16 workdays was lost for each time loss case in the private sector in 1984; this was unchanged from 1983. Estimated total lost workdays in the private sector equals a loss of one year of work for 400 employees. If measured in terms of salary the cost of the lost work time would be over \$11 million. (This cost estimate is based on the average monthly salary figures for 1984 from the Statistical Quarterly, Fourth Quarter 1984.)

During 1984 the Alaska Division of Workers' Compensation processed 11,398 time loss claims; an increase of 5% over 1983. Private industry accounted for 86% of these claims. Only 5% of the cases were due to occupational illnesses. Injuries are most prevalent during the summer and early fall when Alaska's labor force is at its seasonal peak. In 1984, August was the peak month for on-the-job time loss injuries. Women filed only 19.1% of the time loss claims during 1984 although they comprised over 40% of the work force. The low proportion of claims from women is due to the fact that women tend to be found in less hazardous occupations.

OSHA Recordable Injuries and Illnesses Incidence Rates Alaska 1980-1984



Industry Highlights

In 1984 the oil and gas industry regained most of the employment it lost during 1983. The occupational injury and illness rate declined for the third year in a row, and in 1984 the rate of 10.6 rivaled the record low rate of 10.5 set in 1975. The time loss case rate for oil and gas (4.2 cases per 100 workers) was a record low in 1984.

Employment dropped in 1984 for the first time since 1979 as the four year boom in construction employment ended. The rate of occupational injuries and illnesses in construction was at its lowest level in four years. The lost workday case rate for construction fell from 8.1 to 7.0 to equal the record low set in 1980. The number of estimated lost workdays in construction decreased 1% from 1983; the first drop since 1980.

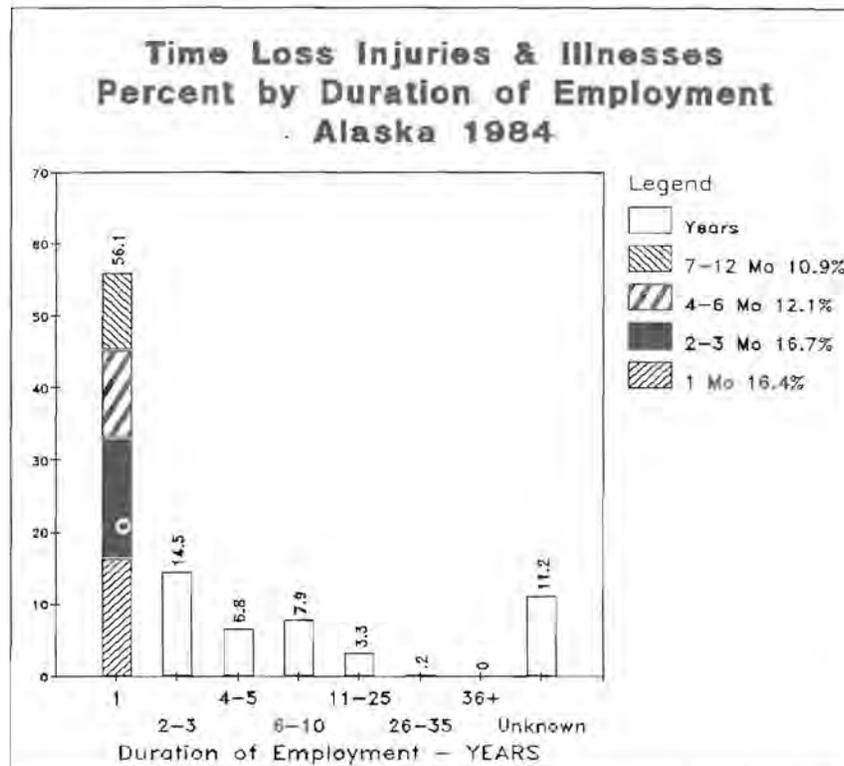
Firms in the manufacturing industries typically have the highest incidence rates for all categories. In 1984, the manufacturing rate for injuries and illnesses was 23.0 which is consistent with rates of prior

years. Manufacturing employment was at its lowest level in seven years. In Alaska manufacturing is composed mainly of seafood processing and lumber and wood products. Manufacturing accounts for 5% of Alaska's nonfederal employment and 12% of the reported time loss injury and illness cases.

Most Frequent Injuries

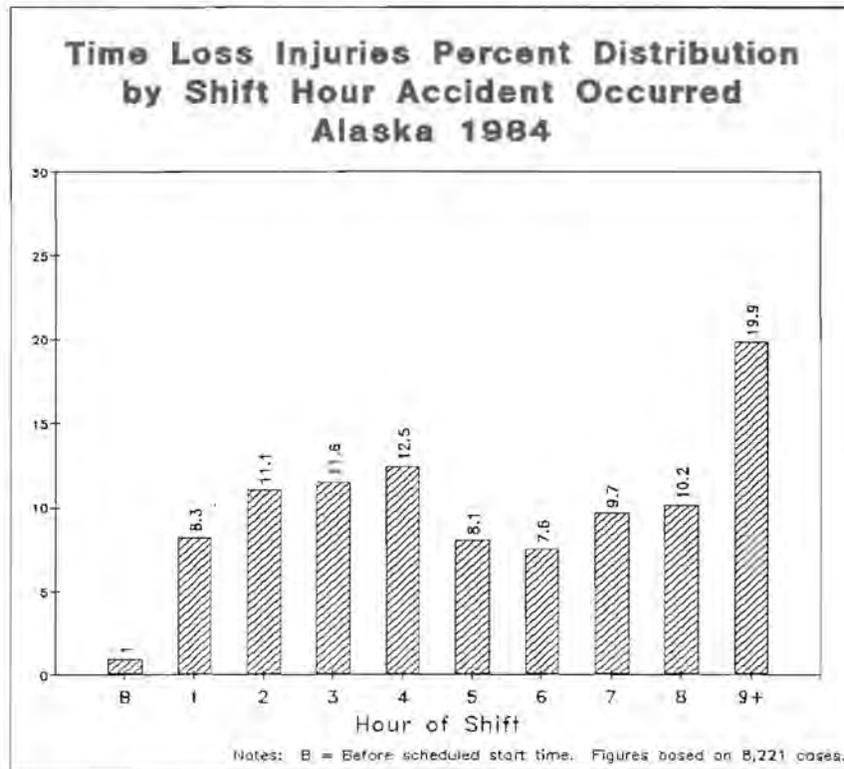
Data show that sprains and strains are the leading type of injury, accounting for 26.6% of the total. The back, involved in one-fourth of all time loss cases, is the most frequently injured part of the body. Sprains and strains are the most common back injuries with 95% of all back injuries due to sprains and strains. During 1984, as in prior years, overexertion was the leading cause of injury. In this year 86% of all overexertion cases were sprains and strains.

Time loss case data have consistently shown that the first few months on a job are the most hazardous for an employee. In 1984, 63% of all time loss injuries (excluding those of unknown job duration) involved employees during their first year on the job and 18% during the first month on the job.



Overtime - Injury Time?

Roughly one-fifth of all time loss injuries occur after the eighth work hour. In industries which characteristically have long working hours the percentage of accidents occurring after eight work hours is greater than the average. This information points out that fatigue plays a significant role in the occurrence of time loss accidents.

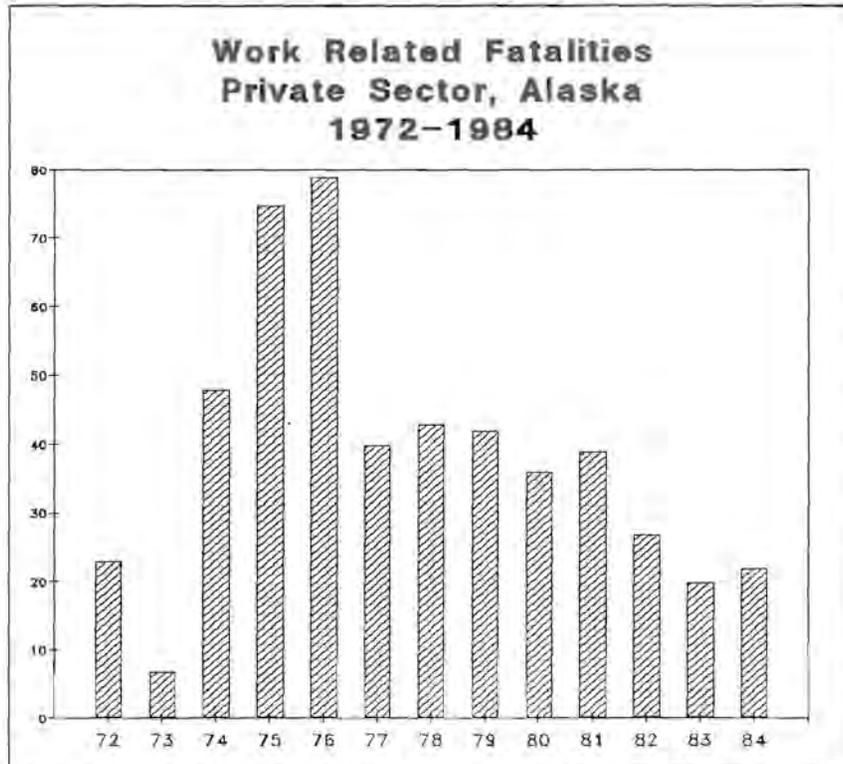


Fishing Industry

Up to 25,000 people fish commercially in Alaska. During state fiscal year 1985 the Alaska fishermen's fund received 2,999 claims for expenses resulting from work related injuries or illnesses incurred by commercial fishermen. This is a 14% increase over the prior year. One-third of the claims were filed by nonresident fishermen. Just over one-half of the claims were from fishermen in the Southcentral District.

Aircraft Related Deaths

During 1984 there were 23 work related deaths which were compensable under the Alaska Workers' Compensation Act. The leading cause of these deaths was aircraft accidents (6 cases or 26%). Aircraft accidents are frequently the leading cause of work related deaths in Alaska. In some prior years aircraft accidents were the cause of death in over one-half of the compensable cases. The number of compensable deaths recorded in 1983 and 1984 are the lowest since 1973.



The annual report, *Occupational Injury and Illness Information, Alaska 1984*, contains more detailed information on work related injuries and illnesses. This publication is available from the Alaska Department of Labor, Research and Analysis Section.