

Most Common Workplace Fatalities

What's the most common cause of workplace fatalities?

You may be surprised to learn that it is highway crashes. About one in four workers killed on-the-job in 2003 (the most recent year for which data is available) – 1,350 workers – died in a highway incident.

This is just the number of workers killed while driving a vehicle at work. It does not include 120 workers killed each year while working in roadway work zones. Most Laborers, of course, don't drive at work, but LIUNA Business Managers and Business Agents are in their car or truck for a good portion of every day. We don't want them to become one of these statistics.

On the other hand, most Laborers do drive their vehicles to and from work. Indeed, it is difficult to work construction if you don't have your own transportation. Though a fatal crash on the way home after work would not add to this official total, it probably should. A long day of physical labor, perhaps with overtime, and a long drive home, maybe after dark, could easily be the real source of the fatigue that caused the fatal crash.

Almost 45,000 Americans are killed every year in highway crashes. Yet, these are among the most preventable of all deaths.

Seat belt use reduces the risk of death by 60 percent for light-truck occupants and by 45 percent for occupants of passenger cars. It also reduces the severity of non-fatal injuries. On average, in-patient hospital care costs for an unbelted victim are 50 percent higher than for a belted occupant.

No data exists to document the extent of safety belt use by Laborers or LIUNA officials. Anecdotal evidence suggests the rate may be rather low compared to other segments of the population.

Yet, most crash deaths occur within 25 miles of home (often, on the way to or from work) and at speeds of less than 40 miles per hour. Reality is that the risk of becoming a highway death statistic is significant.

If your own fate does not concern you, you might want to consider the impact of your behavior on your children. Studies show that nearly 60 percent of teenagers say their parents are the biggest influence on their driving habits and that teens inherit the bad driving habits of their parents.

Meanwhile, crashes are the leading cause of death for 15 to 20 year-olds. Whose example are they following?