

# Issues



## Repetitive Trauma Disorders in Labor Statistics

U.S. Department of Labor  
Bureau of Labor Statistics

### Repetitive Tasks Loosen Some Workers' Grip on Safety and Health

Ailments from performing repetitive tasks at work have been increasingly recognized and reported by physicians and employers in recent years. In fact, the latest tally of such disorders—281,800 in 1992—was more than double the comparable count reported 4 years earlier. Federal Government statistics on repeated-trauma disorders span a variety of ailments resulting from repeated motion, pressure, or vibration, such as carpal tunnel syndrome, tendinitis, and noise-induced hearing loss.

Although still just a small fraction of the 6.8 million injuries and illnesses reported by private employers in 1992, repeated-trauma disorders are growing far more rapidly than other work-related problems. The number of repeated-trauma cases reported in 1992 was 144 percent higher than the number in 1988. By contrast, the number of injury and illness cases, except repeated traumas, was 3 percent higher in 1992 than in 1988. Repeated-trauma disorders, moreover, are beginning to spread beyond their traditional haunts in manufacturing, affecting increasing numbers of workers in offices, stores, and other nonfactory settings.

The accompanying chart tracks the shifting allocations of repeated-trauma disorders between manufacturing and private nonmanufacturing industries. It shows that nonmanufacturing industries' share has risen steadily, from 10 percent of all such disorders reported in 1988 to 22 percent reported in 1992. Over this period, both industry groups experienced sharp increases in reported cases. The share for nonmanufacturing industries rose because the number of repeated-

trauma disorders increased more than fivefold, far outstripping the doubling of similar cases reported in manufacturing industries.

#### Auto and meat plants lead list

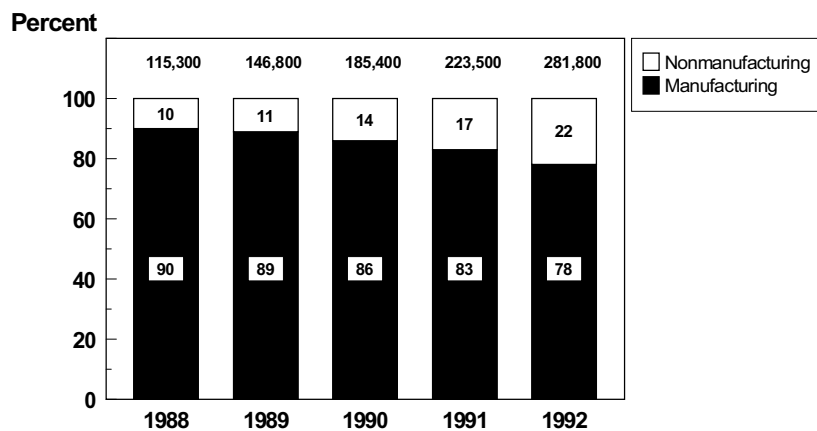
Leading the list of industries with the largest number of repeated-trauma cases were motor vehicle and meat products manufacturing, where about 1 in every 4 of all reported repeated-trauma cases occurred. (See table.) The repetitive nature of work in these settings, often performed using tools on assembly lines, is well documented. Not all manufacturing, however, can be characterized this way. Witness newspaper publishing, a manufacturing industry where repeated trauma disorders are primarily a result of constant computer keying.

Of special note are the four non-manufacturing industries, three of which

made the list for the first time. (The list includes any industry with at least 2,500 cases reported in 1992.) Grocery stores primarily draws its ties to repeated-trauma disorders through the placing, grasping, and moving of objects, such as the scanning done by workers at check-out counters. The other three nonmanufacturing industries cited for the first time in 1992 were hospitals; fire, marine, and casualty insurance; and telephone communications. Three other nonmanufacturing industries stand poised for listing in years to come: Scheduled airlines, department stores, and mail-order and other nonstore retailers.

"Disorders associated with repeated trauma" is one of seven categories of work-related illnesses included in the Bureau's Annual Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses. The survey

Percent distribution of disorders associated with repeated trauma by major industry group, 1988-92



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual Surveys

**Industries with the largest number of repeated-trauma disorders reported in 1992**

Industry	Cases	Industry	Cases
Total private .....	281,800		
Motor vehicles/equipment .....	40,600	Household appliances .....	3,500
Meat products .....	36,500	Electronic components and accessories .....	3,500
Men's/boys' furnishings .....	8,600	Misc. electrical equipment and supplies .....	3,400
Aircraft and parts .....	8,600	<b>Fire, marine, and casualty insurance</b> .....	3,400
<b>Grocery stores</b> .....	5,800	Medical instruments and supplies .....	3,100
Miscellaneous plastics .....		Newspapers .....	2,700
manufacturing .....	5,200	<b>Telephone communications</b> .....	2,700
Metal forgings/stampings .....	5,100		
<b>Hospitals</b> .....	4,500		
Knitting mills .....	3,900		
Refrigeration machinery .....	3,500		

Note: Nonmanufacturing industries are in boldface.

provides extensive data on injuries and illnesses for several hundred detailed industries. For more information contact, the Office of Safety, Health, and Working Conditions, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2 Massachusetts Ave., NE., Room 3180, Washington, DC 20212-0001, (202) 606-6304.

Information in this report is available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: (202) 606-7828, TDD phone (202) 606-5897, TDD message referral phone: 1-800-326-2577.

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