



U.S. Department of Labor  
Bureau of Labor Statistics

## New Data Highlight Gravity of Construction Falls

Falls sound an especially ominous note of human fragility in the construction industry, which employed about half the Nation's 661 workers who fell to their death in 1994. Falls to a lower level, in fact, led all other ways in which construction workers were fatally injured that year. They far outdistanced fatal highway incidents—which ranked first in nationwide workplace deaths—and electrocutions, another fatal risk that construction workers face much more often than do workers in other industries.<sup>1</sup>

The BLS nationwide Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries counted 330 fatal falls among the 1,027 deaths in the construction industry reported in 1994. Falls made up nearly a third of construction fatalities, compared to a tenth of all fatal work injuries nationwide that year. The accompanying table shows that falls from a roof or from a scaffold or other temporary platform together made up slightly more than half of the 330 fatal construction falls. Another fifth were attributable to falls from a ladder or from a building girder or other structural steel member. Falls from elevations accounted for about half or more of the 1994 fatality totals for certain construction trades, including roofers, structural metal workers, carpenters, and painters.

<sup>1</sup> See chart for distribution of construction fatalities among six broad categories of work-related events and exposures. Where appropriate, the chart also depicts the *leading* event of a broad category, for example, the important sub-category "highway incidents" appears separately within the bar marked "transportation incidents."

### Other falls at work

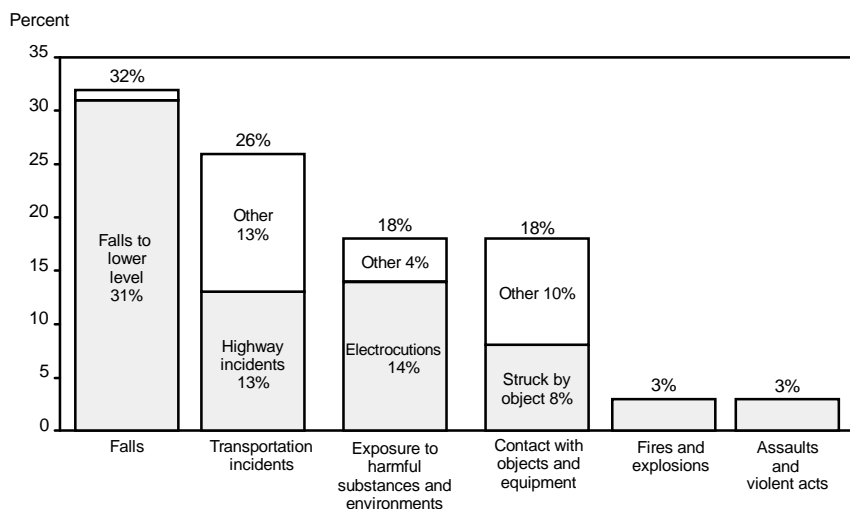
Besides profiling fatal falls, BLS recently began surveying the number of serious, nonfatal falls in private workplaces that required injured wage and salary workers to take off a workday or more. In 1993, the latest year for which such data are available, nearly 42,000 disabling falls in the construction industry were reported; they required a median of 14 recuperation days away from work. That year, about 1 in every 100 private construction workers sustained a disabling fall, double the national incidence rate for such occurrences.

Though disabling and fatal falls commonly originate from elevations, the object from which workers fall can differ markedly. Fall from a ladder, for example, was by far the most common

type of elevated fall resulting in lost worktime, while most fatal falls originated from a roof or scaffold. Disabling falls, moreover, commonly occurred on the same level, say ground or walkway, that supported the construction worker at the inception of the fall. Fatal falls on the same level, by contrast, were uncommon. (See table.)

Relatively lengthy periods of recuperation reflect the hazardous nature of construction falls. The 14-day median for disabling construction falls was twice the typical absence required for falls in all private industry. Part of the difference reflects certain types of falls, found disproportionately in construction, that result in especially lengthy absences, such as falls from a roof or a scaffold. Even the same type of fall, however, often requires a relatively lengthy

How construction workers were fatally injured, 1994



SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1994

**Fatal and disabling falls in the construction industry, 1993-94**

Type of construction fall	Percent distribution		Median workdays lost from disabling falls <sup>2</sup>
	Fatal falls <sup>1</sup> (n=330)	Disabling falls <sup>2</sup> (n=41,800)	
All falls .....	100	100	14 days
Fall to lower level .....	96	57	17
Down stairs or steps .....	1	4	12
From floor, dock, or ground level .....	3	3	11
From ladder .....	14	20	15
From roof .....	32	7	33
From scaffold, staging .....	21	8	21
From building girder or other structural steel member .....	8	1	28
From nonmoving vehicle .....	3	6	11
Fall on same level .....	3	37	10
Other or unspecified .....	1	6	-

<sup>1</sup> Based on data from the 1994 BLS Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, which covered all construction workers—wage and salaried, self employed, and family members—in the private and public sectors.

<sup>2</sup> Based on data from the 1993 BLS Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, which covered just wage and salaried workers in private construction industries. Disabling falls are those that result in lost worktime. Median days away from work is the point at which half those cases involved more days and half involved fewer days. Dash indicates that a median was not computed.

recuperation in construction, for example, a median absence of 15 days for ladder falls in that industry compared with a 10-day median for the same type of fall in private industry as a whole.

Data for this report were derived from the BLS Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries and its companion Survey of Nonfatal Occupational Injuries and Illnesses. For more information on these programs, contact the Office of Safety, Health and Working Conditions, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2 Massachusetts Ave. NE., Room 3180, Washington DC 20212, (202) 606-6175.

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