

Rates of Opioid Deaths Differ Vastly by Occupation

A CDC-funded [study](#) found that Massachusetts workers died of opioid overdoses at vastly different rates depending on their professions. While trends may vary significantly in other states, this study has important implications for workers, employers, and health care professionals throughout the US.

The study examined 4,302 death certificates filed in Massachusetts from 2011 through 2015. During this time, more than 24% of opioid-related deaths occurred among construction and extraction workers. To be more specific, almost all of the opioid-related deaths within this sector (97%) were suffered by construction workers. Occupations in agriculture, forestry, and fishing had the second highest rate of death from opioids. In this sector, the majority of opioid-related deaths (74%) were suffered by people who worked in fishing jobs. Other occupations with a higher rate of deaths included, in descending order: material moving; installation, maintenance, and repair; transportation; production; food preparation and serving; building grounds cleaning and maintenance; and healthcare support.

The study found that opioid-related deaths were more common in industries known to have high rates of work-related injuries and illness. They were also more common in occupations with lower availability of paid sick leave or more job insecurity, “suggesting that the need to return to work soon after an injury may be contributing to high rates of opioid-related overdose death.” The study’s authors linked their findings regarding the construction industry in particular to “previous reports that opioids are widely used for pain management following work-related injuries.” High rates of injury and musculoskeletal pain, combined with high rates of mental distress and fear of job loss, may be contributing to fatal overdoses among construction workers.

In a [comment](#) on the study, Massachusetts Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel, MD, MPH said, “Ensuring that jobs are safe, that the risk of injury is low and that workers have the time for rehabilitation and are not self-medicating to keep working are all key to decreasing opioid overdose deaths among workers.”

In a [newsletter item](#) on the study, NIOSH wrote that the study highlighted “the critical need for immediate interventions. For example, educational programs and policies targeted toward occupations with a high rate of fatal opioid overdose should aim to decrease workplace hazards that could cause injury resulting in opioid prescriptions. Other critical steps include post-injury pain management with safer practices for prescribing opioids, overdose prevention education, and effective treatment for opioid use disorders among workers.” While government officials and regulators may be positioned to provide some of the necessary programs, employers also have the opportunity to actively establish policies and priorities to help protect vulnerable workers from opioid abuse.

September is Pain Awareness Month

This September, organizations like the American Chronic Pain Association will cooperate to [raise public awareness](#) of issues in the area of pain and pain management. Check out the National Institute on Drug Abuse’s [resources on pain](#) for more information on the relationship between chronic pain and opioid abuse. Consider what you can do in your workplace and your personal life to be an advocate for a healthier approach to pain management.



Additional Info: [Opioid-related Overdose Deaths in Massachusetts by Industry and Occupation, 2011-2015](#); [Boston Globe Write-Up](#); [MS Dept of Public Health Press Release](#); [NIOSH Newsletter Item](#); [NIOSH on Opioids](#)



October 7-13 is Fire Prevention Week

This year's Fire Prevention Week is "Look. Listen. Learn. Be aware. Fire can happen anywhere." The NFPA is working to educate people about three basic, essential steps that you can take to reduce the likelihood of having a fire while increasing your odds of escaping in the event that there is one:

1. **LOOK** for places a fire could start. Take a good look around your home. Identify potential fire hazards and take care of them.
2. **LISTEN** for the sound of a smoke alarm. Once it sounds, you might have only minutes to safely escape. If you do hear an alarm, go to a safe prearranged meeting place where everyone knows to meet.
3. **LEARN** two ways out of every room and make sure all doors and windows leading outside open easily and clutter-free.

Here are some tips for preventing fires at work and at home.

Fire Prevention and Protection at Work

Plan for disaster. Make an evacuation plan and conduct regular fire drills so that employees know what to do in a stressful situation, including accounting for employees once outside the building so you can be sure that everyone's safe. Reach out to your local fire department and provide them with an opportunity to become familiar with your facility, its location, and its specific hazards.

Whatever protections your facility has, make sure that they receive regular maintenance. If you have a fire alarm system, confirm that it's certified as required and tested annually. If you have private fire hydrants, check that they're being flushed at least once a year and that they're on a routine preventive maintenance schedule. Make a schedule for checking fire doors, sprinkler systems, fire alarms, and

anything else that you're counting on to keep employees safe.

Confirm that you have enough portable fire extinguishers, that they're easily accessible, that they're the right kinds for their locations within your facility, that they're regularly inspected and recharged and this is noted on the annual inspection tag. Be sure that employees are receiving periodic instruction regarding proper use of the extinguisher are kept up to date on general fire protection procedures.

Fire Prevention and Protection at Home

Cooking is the leading cause of home fires and home fire injuries, and the leading cause of fires in the kitchen is unattended cooking. Stay in the kitchen when you're frying, boiling, grilling, or broiling food. If you're simmering, baking, or roasting food, stay home and check it regularly.

Heating equipment is the second most common cause of home fires, including space heaters, fireplace/chimney, and central heating unit, with failure to clean being the most common cause of heating equipment-related fires, especially concerning chimneys. The most common cause of death in this category was leaving combustibles (upholstered furniture, clothing, mattress, bedding, etc.) too close to the equipment.

Modern homes burn faster than ever before. In a typical home fire, you may have as little as one or two minutes to escape safely from the time that the smoke alarm sounds. Fire escape planning and drills are an essential part of home fire safety. Develop and practice your home fire escape plan *before* disaster strikes.

Additional reading: [NSC advice](#); [AIG Checklist](#); [NFPA Home Safety Checklist](#); [FEMA Home Safety Checklist](#); [OSHA Small Business Handbook](#)



Join us on October 11 for Hawkeye on Safety

Thursday, October 11, please join us at the Coralville Marriott Conference Center for a one-day occupational safety conference. **Hawkeye on Safety** is intended for health and safety professionals, construction workers, project/facility personnel, HR professionals, general industry, and anyone looking for CEUs in health and safety. This year's keynote speaker will be [Chad Hymas](#), whose incredible story will remind you just how important safety is for you and your family. You can register to attend at [HawkeyeOnSafety.com](#).

Temporary Worker Safety: A Shared Responsibility

As part of their [Temporary Worker Initiative](#), OSHA recently released two guidance documents discussing respiratory protection and hearing conservation. Both bulletins usefully illustrate the shared responsibility of host employers and staffing agencies for safeguarding temporary worker safety and health. While different divisions of responsibility may be appropriate for different situations, it's important for all relevant parties to know that host employers and staffing agencies are jointly responsible for maintaining safe working environments for temporary workers, just as they are individually obligated to do for their respective permanent staff.

The [bulletin on respiratory protection](#) states that the “the host employer and staffing agency are jointly responsible to ensure workers wear appropriate respirators when required.” However, they must not make workers provide or pay for their own respiratory protection. The document further explains that the “host employer will usually have the primary responsibility for evaluating exposure levels, implementing and maintaining engineering, administrative, and work practice controls, providing an appropriate respirator, and maintaining a respiratory protection program” because the host employer controls the worksite, is likely to be more familiar with the chemicals present in the workplace, can maintain appropriate surveillance, most likely already has a program in place for permanent staff, and can more easily adjust the program as circumstances change, among other reasons.

However, staffing agencies can't simply assume that host employers are taking responsibility for providing appropriate respiratory protection to temporary workers. Staffing agencies must also take reasonable steps to ensure their employees are protected as required by OSHA standards, including maintaining awareness of hazards at the worksite and understanding the protective measures the host employer has implemented. The staffing agency must communicate regularly with workers and host employers regarding any changes to the respiratory protection program.

The [bulletin on noise exposure](#) and hearing conservation follows a similar structure. It summarizes the conditions that require applying various controls to limit workers' noise exposures, up to and including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), establishes that host employers and staffing agencies are jointly responsible for protecting workers from hazardous noise levels, and clarifies that workers must not be required to provide or pay for their own hearing protection devices. “In addition,” writes OSHA, “employees must be paid for the time spent receiving their audiograms, and the audiograms must be at no cost to the employee.”

As with respiratory protection, and for similar reasons, the host employer will usually have the primary responsibility for determining noise exposure levels, implementing controls, providing appropriate hearing protection, and maintaining the hearing conservation program as required. The staffing agency has an obligation to understand any noise exposure hazards and controls in a worksite before assigning any workers, and is again responsible for communicating with the host employer and temporary employees about hazards and hearing protection.

This article continues on the next page.



Additional Info:
[Safety & Health Magazine article;](#)
[OSHA Temporary Worker Initiative;](#)
[NIOSH Respiratory Protection Resources;](#)
[NIOSH Noise and Hearing Conservation Resources](#)

Continued from previous page: The staffing agency should inform employees about noise hazards they may encounter, “and ensure, as far as possible, that its workers are adequately protected, including following any safety and health rules ... required by the host employer.”

Both bulletins discuss relevant obligations particular to their subjects, and they each include an example scenario demonstrating what shared responsibility for temporary worker safety and health means in practice. If your company uses temporary workers, or if you yourself are a temporary worker, these bulletins and OSHA’s Temporary Worker Initiative may well provide you with essential information. Whether permanent or temporary, every worker deserves a safe workplace—and furthermore, the law requires it.

Do You Know Respirators? September 5 is N95 Day



N95 Day is your annual opportunity to make sure that you’re up to date on current topics in respiratory protection. NIOSH will be leading the conversation on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram using the [#N95Day](#) hashtag. The Heartland Center is also one of many partners who will be helping them to spread the word throughout the day.

You can participate by [registering now](#) for a National Personal Protective Technology Laboratory N95 Day webinar that will take place on Wednesday, September 5 at 1:00 PM Eastern. A panel of NIOSH experts will share the science behind established respiratory protection guidance and recommendations, while also covering topics like facial hair and respirator use, NIOSH-approved surgical N95s, and the importance of using the [NIOSH Certified Equipment List](#). There will also be time for Q&A after the presentation.

Here are some venues where you can join us on [#N95Day](#) to learn more:

- [@NIOSH Twitter](#)
- [@NIOSH NPPTL Twitter](#)
- [N95 Day Website](#)
- [NIOSH Instagram](#)
- [NIOSH Facebook](#)
- [N95 Day Webinar](#)

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