

Safety Note #74

## ANNUAL WORKPLACE FATALITIES



Data available from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) indicates, between 1992 and 2002, an average of 604 worker fatalities occurred annually in California. Moreover, during the same time period there was an annual average of 589 farming-related fatalities nationwide. Workplace fatalities are preventable if employees maintain vigilance about potential work hazards and follow established safe work practices, including wearing appropriate personal protection equipment.

According to information available from the BLS Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries staff <sup>(1)</sup>, the most common causes of workplace fatalities are traffic accidents (21%), homicides (16%), falls (10%), struck by object (9%), and electrocutions (6%). Described below are additional types of workplace fatalities that occur on average each year.

### Common Types of Yearly Workplace Fatalities

- On average, 30 workers annually die from heatstroke. Farm workers and construction laborers are most likely to succumb to heatstroke (see Safety Note #20).
- Carbon monoxide poisoning causes an average of 30 fatalities per year. Mechanics repairing vehicles in closed structures are at risk for this type of poisoning (see Safety Note #39).
- Lightning causes an average of 15 fatalities per year. Farm workers are frequently at risk for being struck by lightning.
- Accidental discharges of firearms result in an average of 13 fatalities (see Safety Note #63).
- On average, 12 farm workers a year are killed by bulls or other farm animals.
- Husbands or ex-husbands kill an average of 12 women at work during a year.
- Exploding tires (usually when inflating the tire) cause an average of 10 deaths per year (see Safety Note #47).
- Methane gas produced from manure pits or sewers asphyxiates an average of 10 workers per year. Farm and sanitation workers are at greatest risk to be asphyxiated by methane gas (see Safety Note #39).
- An average of eight workers die each year from burns caused by hot water or steam while inspecting or cleaning machinery.
- Five bicycle delivery workers are killed, on average, each year.
- On average, four lumber mill worker fatalities are caused every year by debarking machinery (see Safety Note #33).
- Allergic reactions to bee stings cause an average of four deaths each year. Farm workers and other outdoor occupations are at greatest risk to bee sting allergic reactions.

(1) Source: *Perils in the Workplace, Compensation and Working Conditions Fall 1997, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries Staff.*