

## Fatal Occupational Injuries to Government Workers, 1992 to 2001

by [Stephen M. Pegula](#)

Bureau of Labor Statistics

*Originally Posted: February 25, 2004*

*During the 10-year period from 1992 to 2001, 6,455 government workers suffered a fatal work injury; more than half of these fatalities resulted from transportation incidents. Local government employees incurred the most fatalities among the public sector groups, although at a lower rate than private sector workers.*

Over the period from 1992 to 2001, 6,455 employees of a government entity were fatally injured while at work.<sup>1</sup> During that period, the annual number fluctuated from a high of 780 in 1995 to a low of 566 in 1999. Because government workers are employed in a wide variety of occupations, they provide a diverse cross section of workers to examine. Among the three levels of government, workers in local government, which accounted for 50 percent of all government employment, incurred the highest *number* (3,227) of occupational fatalities over the period.<sup>2</sup> (See table 1.) Workers in Federal government, which accounted for 23 percent of all government employment over the period, faced the highest workplace fatality *rate*. The workplace fatality rate for all government workers was 3.2 per 100,000 employed, and the fatality rate for private sector workers was 5.1 per 100,000 employed.<sup>3</sup>

### Demographics

Of the 6,455 government employees that were fatally injured on the job from 1992 to 2001, 5,694 (88 percent) were men. (See table 2.) The remaining 761 (12 percent) were women. In contrast, women accounted for only 8 percent of all occupational fatalities over the period. In terms of age, 12 percent of the fatally injured workers were aged 24 years and under, 26 percent were aged 25 to 34, 24 percent were aged 35 to 44, 22 percent were aged 45 to 54, and 16 percent were aged 55 and over.

Whites accounted for 77 percent of all workplace fatalities in government over the 10-year span; they accounted for 73 percent of total workplace fatalities. Black workers accounted for 12 percent of the fatalities in government and 10 percent of overall workplace fatalities. Finally, Hispanic workers represented 6 percent of the fatalities in government and 11 percent of overall workplace fatalities.

### Event Or Exposure

Approximately half of the fatal occupational injuries to government workers resulted from transportation incidents. Nearly half (1,718) of these were highway incidents. Of the 1,718 highway incidents, 988 involved a collision between vehicles or mobile equipment, 276 involved a vehicle striking a stationary object or equipment on the side of the road, and 259 involved a jackknifed or overturned vehicle. Additionally, aircraft incidents accounted for 808 workplace fatalities in government over the period. Helicopters were the source of 37 percent of aircraft fatalities among government workers, but only 21 percent of all occupational fatalities from aircraft incidents. Finally, 641 fatal injuries occurred when a worker was struck by a vehicle or mobile equipment.

The next largest event or exposure category was assaults and violent acts, which accounted for 22 percent of the workplace fatalities in government over the 1992-2001 period. Of these 1,425 deaths from assaults and violent acts, 1,058 were homicides and 352 resulted from self-inflicted injuries.<sup>4</sup> The next most common event or exposure category among government workers was exposure to harmful substances or environments, which accounted for 426 (7 percent) workplace fatalities during the period. Of these, 159 involved contact with electric current, and 139 involved oxygen deficiency (122 were drownings). A total of 423 government workers were killed through contact with objects or equipment--most (257) from being struck by an object. In such fatalities, the victims most often were struck by trees and bullets.<sup>5</sup> Finally, 359 government workers lost their lives in falls, and 270 died in fires and explosions.

## Worker Activity And Location

Approximately half of the government workers who suffered fatal workplace injuries over the 1992-2001 period were performing vehicular and transportation operations at the time of their deaths. Another 1,063 were engaged in protective service activities--such as apprehending, breaking up a fight, and chasing (267); and fighting a fire (231). A total of 544 government workers were killed while they were constructing, repairing, and cleaning. A street or highway was the site of 2,735 fatal occupational injuries to government employees over the period. In addition, 744 workers were killed in a public building, 475 workers were killed in an industrial place or premise, and 357 workers were killed in a private residence (while on the job).

## Occupation

Among the occupational groups, government workers in protective service occupations were the most likely to incur a fatal workplace injury over the period. Within protective service occupations, police and detectives, including supervisors, accounted for 1,448 workplace fatalities, and firefighting and fire prevention occupations, including supervisors, accounted for 437. In addition, 1,135 workplace fatalities occurred in military occupations.<sup>6</sup> Other occupations with a large number of fatal occupational injuries to government employees include transportation and material moving occupations (434); handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers (375); and construction trades (310).

## Government Levels And Industry

About half (3,227) of the fatalities in government over the 1992-2001 period occurred in local government, which accounted for half of overall government employment during the period. Among the total number of local government fatalities, almost half (1,505) worked in justice, public order, and safety--including 1,033 in police protection and 401 in fire protection. Also, 327 of the fatalities occurred in educational services; 245 in electric, gas, and sanitary services; 177 in highway and street construction; and 111 in the environmental quality and housing sector.

Among the three levels of government, Federal workers had the second-largest number (1,923) of fatalities over the 1992-2001 period. Federal workers accounted for nearly 30 percent of all government fatalities during the period, although they made up 23 percent of government employment.<sup>7</sup> The majority (1,253) of these fatalities occurred in the areas of national security and international affairs. In addition, 146 members of the U.S. Postal Service and 105 workers in the environmental quality and housing sector suffered a fatal workplace injury over the period.

State government had the fewest workplace fatalities within overall government. During the study period, 1,224 State government employees died while on the job. Among these fatalities, 343 worked in the justice, public order, and safety industry; 176 in the administration of economic programs; 162 in educational services; and 156 in highway and street construction.

The government category also contains workers from other governments that were killed on the job while working in the United States. Over the 1992-2001 period, 48 workers of another country's government were victims of an occupational fatality in the United States. An additional 33 workers classified in "other government" were also killed during this period. This category includes regional cooperative entities that are not classified in any other government category.

The workplace fatality rate in overall government during the period was 3.2 per 100,000 workers.<sup>8</sup> The fatality rate in the private sector for the same period was 5.1 per 100,000 workers. Within government, the fatality rate was 4.1 for Federal workers, 2.4 for State workers, and 3.2 for local government workers.

## Large Fatality Incidents

Government workers frequently are fatally injured in incidents that claim the life of at least one other worker.<sup>9</sup> Over the 1992-2001 period, 1 in 6 government workplace fatalities had another fatality associated with it. More than half of these fatalities occurred in three occupational categories: firefighters, police officers, and military personnel. Other occupations

within government that had multiple fatality incidents over the period include teachers, painters, truck drivers, pilots, janitors, engineers, and construction laborers.

Two historical events in which a large number of government workers were killed on the job were the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In the Oklahoma City bombing, 98 government employees lost their lives; nearly all were Federal workers. The occupations with the highest number of fatalities due to this event were administrators and officials, public administration; police and detectives, public service; and general office clerks.

The September 11th attacks claimed the lives of 622 government workers. Among those killed, 408 suffered a fatal injury while performing rescue efforts, 204 were in an office building, and 10 were passengers on a commercial airliner. (See table 3.) More than 80 percent of the fatalities resulting from the terrorist attacks occurred in New York City. (See table 4.) Approximately three-quarters of the fatally injured government workers were employees of local government. Of those killed during rescue efforts, 99 percent worked for local government. This figure included 343 workers in fire protection and 23 workers in police protection. About 20 percent of the fatalities occurred in Federal government, predominately in national security; 9 percent were in military occupations.

## Conclusion

Over the period from 1992 to 2001, more than 10 percent of all occupational fatalities occurred among government workers. Most of the government workers who died on the job were male and white. More than three-fourths of these deaths were attributable either to transportation incidents or to assaults and violent acts. (The comparable figure for workers in general is 60 percent.) The occupations in which government workers were most likely to suffer a fatal workplace injury were protective service occupations (such as police and firefighters) and military occupations. Within the three branches of government, workers in local government suffered the most fatal workplace injuries during the period, while workers in Federal government faced the highest fatality rate.

Stephen M. Pegula

Economist, Office of Safety, Health, and Working Conditions, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Telephone: (202) 691-6166; E-mail: [Pegula.Stephen@bls.gov](mailto:Pegula.Stephen@bls.gov)

## Notes

**1** The total number of workplace fatalities in overall government includes fatalities among employees of Federal, State, and local governments, as well as fatalities among persons working in the United States for another country's government or for other government entities such as regional cooperative organizations. These totals do not include the fatalities that resulted from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which are discussed later in the article. Data on workplace fatalities are from the BLS [Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries \(CFOI\)](#). Preliminary 2001 CFOI data were used in this analysis. For more information on workplace fatalities data, visit the CFOI page of the BLS website at <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshcfoi1.htm>.

**2** The estimates of total government employment used in this analysis include the resident armed forces. The estimate combines data from the [Current Population Survey \(CPS\)](#) on civilian government employment with data on the number of resident military personnel from the Department of Defense. For more information on the CPS, visit the CPS page of the BLS website at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/home.htm>.

**3** The overall government rate is the combined fatality rate for Federal, State, and local government workers from 1992 to 2001.

**4** The total number of assaults and violent acts includes homicides, suicides, and attacks by animals.

**5** These are cases in which the death was not intentional. If a worker is shot and killed during a training exercise or in an accident, the fatality is classified as resulting from being struck by a discharged object rather than from an assault or violent act.

**6** These fatalities are for the resident military population only. Fatalities occurring among U.S. military personnel outside the United States are not included.

**7** See note 2.

**8** The fatality rate is the number of workplace fatalities per 100,000 workers employed. Employment data for this calculation are from the BLS [Current Population Survey \(CPS\)](#). Employment data for resident military personnel, which are included in the fatality rate calculations for Federal government employees, are taken from the U.S. Department of Defense. The fatality rate takes into account only those government employees aged 16 and over. Decedents with an undetermined age were excluded from the fatality rate calculations.

**9** These other workers could have been employed by either government or the private sector.

**Table 1. Fatal occupational injuries to government workers by government level and event, 1992–2001**

Characteristics	Fatalities
<b>Federal government (including resident armed forces)</b>	1,923
<b>Transportation incidents</b>	1,191
<b>Highway</b>	366
<b>Collision between vehicles, mobile equipment</b>	173
<b>Aircraft</b>	649
<b>Assaults and violent acts</b>	344
<b>Homicides</b>	206
<b>Suicide, self-inflicted injury</b>	136
<b>State government</b>	1,224
<b>Transportation incidents</b>	778
<b>Highway</b>	419
<b>Collision between vehicles, mobile equipment</b>	274
<b>Worker struck by vehicle, mobile equipment</b>	216
<b>Assaults and violent acts</b>	229
<b>Homicides</b>	153
<b>Local government</b>	3,227
<b>Transportation incidents</b>	1,491
<b>Highway</b>	917
<b>Collision between vehicles, mobile equipment</b>	537
<b>Moving in opposite directions, oncoming</b>	190
<b>Moving in intersection</b>	159
<b>Vehicle struck stationary object or equipment on side of road</b>	180
<b>Noncollision</b>	151
<b>Worker struck by vehicle, mobile equipment</b>	366
<b>Worker struck by vehicle, mobile equipment in roadway</b>	211
<b>Assaults and violent acts</b>	841
<b>Homicides</b>	692
<b>Shooting</b>	614
<b>Suicide, self-inflicted injury</b>	139
<b>Contact with objects and equipment</b>	222
<b>Falls</b>	200
<b>Fall to lower level</b>	139
<b>Exposure to harmful substances or environments</b>	255
<b>Fires and explosions</b>	193
<b>Fires--unintended or uncontrolled</b>	161
<b>Fire in residence, building, or other structure</b>	135

NOTE: This table shows workplace fatalities among employees of Federal, State, and local governments. It excludes fatalities among persons working in the United States for another country's government or for other government entities such as regional cooperative organizations; such fatalities are included in the totals for overall government discussed in the article and shown in table 2. Totals for 2001 exclude fatalities resulting from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Also, the totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI).

**Table 2. Fatal occupational injuries to government workers by selected characteristics, 1992–2001**

Characteristics	Fatalities
<b>Total</b>	6,455
Sex	
<b>Men</b>	5,694
<b>Women</b>	761
Age	
<b>20 to 24 years</b>	598
<b>25 to 34 years</b>	1,662
<b>35 to 44 years</b>	1,552
<b>45 to 54 years</b>	1,390
<b>55 to 64 years</b>	784
<b>65 and over</b>	278
Race or ethnic origin (1)	
<b>White</b>	4,991
<b>Black or African American</b>	789
<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	390
Industry	
<b>Government(2)</b>	6,455
<b>Federal government (including resident armed forces)</b>	1,923
<b>Public Administration</b>	1,641
<b>National security and international affairs</b>	1,253
<b>National security</b>	1,242
<b>State government</b>	1,224
<b>Services</b>	245
<b>Public Administration</b>	740
<b>Justice, public order, and safety</b>	343
<b>Public order and safety</b>	339
<b>Police protection</b>	207
<b>Local government</b>	3,227
<b>Construction</b>	224
<b>Heavy construction, except building</b>	211
<b>Transportation and public utilities</b>	357
<b>Electric, gas, and sanitary services</b>	245

Footnotes:

(1) In this study, the racial categories "White" and "Black or African American" do not include persons from the ethnic category "Hispanic or Latino." Persons identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race.

(2) Included in the overall "Government" category are workplace fatalities among employees of Federal, State, and local governments, as well as fatalities among persons working in the United States for another country's government or for other government entities such as regional cooperative organizations. These totals include fatalities to workers employed in all governmental organizations regardless of industry.

NOTE: Totals for 2001 exclude fatalities resulting from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Also, totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI).

Characteristics	Fatalities
<b>Services</b>	497
<b>Educational services</b>	327
<b>Elementary and secondary schools</b>	292
<b>Public Administration</b>	2,106
<b>Executive, legislative, and general government</b>	377
<b>Justice, public order, and safety</b>	1,505
<b>Public order and safety</b>	1,495
<b>Police protection</b>	1,033
<b>Fire protection</b>	401

Footnotes:

(1) In this study, the racial categories "White" and "Black or African American" do not include persons from the ethnic category "Hispanic or Latino." Persons identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race.

(2) Included in the overall "Government" category are workplace fatalities among employees of Federal, State, and local governments, as well as fatalities among persons working in the United States for another country's government or for other government entities such as regional cooperative organizations. These totals include fatalities to workers employed in all governmental organizations regardless of industry.

NOTE: Totals for 2001 exclude fatalities resulting from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Also, totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI).

**Table 3. Fatal occupational injuries to government workers resulting from the events of September 11, 2001, by industry and occupation**

Characteristics	Total		Office building		Passenger airliner		Rescue efforts	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Total</b>	622	100	204	100	10	100	408	100
Industry								
<b>Government(1)</b>	622	100	204	100	10	100	408	100
<b>Federal government (including resident armed forces)</b>	124	20	116	57	7	70	-	-
<b>National security</b>	118	19	114	56	4	40	-	-
<b>State government</b>	49	8	43	21	3	30	3	1
<b>Local government</b>	449	72	45	22	-	-	404	99
<b>Police protection</b>	25	4	-	-	-	-	23	6
<b>Fire protection</b>	344	55	-	-	-	-	343	84

Footnotes:

(1) Included in the overall "Government" category are workplace fatalities among employees of Federal, State, and local governments, as well as fatalities among persons working in the United States for another country's government or for other government entities such as regional cooperative organizations. These totals include fatalities to workers employed in all governmental organizations regardless of industry.

NOTE: Totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately. Dashes indicate that either no data were reported or the data do not meet publication criteria.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, in cooperation with State, New York City, District of Columbia, and Federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI).

Characteristics	Total		Office building		Passenger airliner		Rescue efforts	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Administration of economic programs</b>	79	13	41	20	-	-	38	9
Occupation								
<b>Managerial and professional specialty</b>	140	23	120	59	10	100	10	2
<b>Executive, administrative, and managerial</b>	120	19	107	52	4	40	9	2
<b>Professional specialty</b>	20	3	13	6	6	60	-	-
<b>Technical, sales, and administrative support</b>	25	4	23	11	-	-	-	-
<b>Technicians and related support occupations</b>	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Service occupations</b>	400	64	4	2	-	-	396	97
<b>Protective service occupations</b>	400	64	4	2	-	-	396	97
<b>Firefighting, including supervisors</b>	335	54	-	-	-	-	335	82
<b>Police and detectives, including supervisors</b>	64	10	3	1	-	-	61	15
<b>Military occupations</b>	54	9	54	26	-	-	-	-

Footnotes:

(1) Included in the overall "Government" category are workplace fatalities among employees of Federal, State, and local governments, as well as fatalities among persons working in the United States for another country's government or for other government entities such as regional cooperative organizations. These totals include fatalities to workers employed in all governmental organizations regardless of industry.

NOTE: Totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately. Dashes indicate that either no data were reported or the data do not meet publication criteria.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, in cooperation with State, New York City, District of Columbia, and Federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI).

**Table 4. Fatal occupational injuries to government workers resulting from the events of September 11, 2001, by selected demographic characteristics**

Characteristics	Total		Office building		Passenger airliner		Rescue efforts	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Total</b>	622	100	204	100	10	100	408	100
State								
<b>New York (New York City only)</b>	500	80	90	44	-	-	408	100
<b>Virginia</b>	120	19	114	56	6	60	-	-

Footnotes:

(1) In this study, the racial categories "White" and "Black or African American" do not include persons from the ethnic category "Hispanic or Latino." Persons identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race.

NOTE: Totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately. Dashes indicate that either no data were reported or the data do not meet publication criteria.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, in cooperation with State, New York City, District of Columbia, and Federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI).

Characteristics	Total		Office building		Passenger airliner		Rescue efforts	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Sex								
<b>Men</b>	548	88	136	67	6	60	406	100
<b>Women</b>	74	12	68	33	4	40	-	-
Age								
<b>20 to 24 years</b>	9	1	7	3	-	-	-	-
<b>25 to 34 years</b>	133	21	26	13	-	-	106	26
<b>35 to 44 years</b>	243	39	60	29	-	-	181	44
<b>45 to 54 years</b>	168	27	64	31	4	40	100	25
<b>55 to 64 years</b>	56	9	41	20	-	-	13	3
<b>65 and over</b>	9	1	6	3	-	-	-	-
Race or ethnic origin <sup>(1)</sup>								
<b>White</b>	480	77	123	60	6	60	351	86
<b>Black or African American</b>	73	12	51	25	3	30	19	5
<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	32	5	13	6	-	-	18	4
<b>Asian</b>	15	2	15	7	-	-	-	-
<b>Other races or not reported</b>	21	3	-	-	-	-	20	5
Footnotes:								
(1) In this study, the racial categories "White" and "Black or African American" do not include persons from the ethnic category "Hispanic or Latino." Persons identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race.								
NOTE: Totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately. Dashes indicate that either no data were reported or the data do not meet publication criteria.								
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, in cooperation with State, New York City, District of Columbia, and Federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI).								