

## Fatal Occupational Injuries from Accidental Gunshot Wounds, 1993-2002

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*Over the period from 1993 to 2002, 175 workers were killed on the job as a result of an accidental gunshot wound--an average of about 18 fatalities per year during that 10-year span.*

From 1993 to 2002,<sup>1</sup> data from the BLS [Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries \(CFOI\)](#) show that 175 workers were killed on the job as the result of an accidental gunshot wound. While this total represented only 0.3 percent of the 61,146 workplace fatalities suffered by all workers during this 10-year span, these fatalities are especially alarming because they involve firearms and are prevalent in military and protective service occupations. (See Table.)

### Demographics Of The Decedents

For the most part, workers who died on the job as a result of an accidental gunshot wound were similar, demographically, to the victims of fatal work injuries in general. Almost 94 percent of those killed by accidental gunshot wounds over the 1993-2002 period were male. For all fatalities during the same study period, males accounted for 92 percent. White workers made up 69 percent of the accidental gunshot fatalities, black workers made up 12 percent, and Hispanic workers made up 15 percent.<sup>2</sup> For all workplace fatalities during the period, white workers accounted for 73 percent, black workers accounted for 10 percent, and Hispanic workers accounted for 12 percent. Wage and salary workers represented 79 percent of the accidental gunshot fatalities, with self-employed workers making up the remainder, which mirrors the figures for all fatal work injuries.

In terms of age, decedents incurring a fatal accidental gunshot wound at work tended to be younger than fatally injured workers in general. During the study period, 72 percent of those fatally injured at work from an accidental gunshot wound were between the ages of 18 and 44. For all fatally injured workers, the comparable figure was 56 percent.

### Industry And Occupation<sup>3</sup>

Approximately two-thirds of the workers who incurred an accidental gunshot wound during the 1993-2002 period were employed in the private sector. Interestingly, the private industry with the largest number of deaths from accidental gunshot wounds was the retail trade industry. More than 17 percent of the total fatalities from accidental gunshot wounds were incurred by workers in this industry. Other industries that recorded relatively large numbers of this type of workplace fatality included agriculture, forestry, and fishing (16 percent); services (15 percent); and manufacturing (7 percent).

More than one-third of all fatal work injuries from accidental gunshot wounds were suffered by government workers. Of these, nearly half (47 percent) worked for the Federal Government, almost all of whom were employed in the national security field.<sup>4</sup> Local government workers accounted for 46 percent of all government fatalities. Within local government, these kinds of occupational fatalities most frequently occurred among workers employed in police protection.

The occupation with the greatest proportion of the fatal work injuries from accidental gunshot wounds over the period was military occupations, which accounted for 15 percent of the fatalities. Among other occupations, police and detectives, including supervisors, accounted for 14 percent of the fatalities; guards, including supervisors, accounted for 7 percent; handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers accounted for 7 percent; and sales supervisors and proprietors accounted for 6 percent.

### Circumstances Of The Accidental Gunshot Fatalities

It is instructive to look at the circumstances surrounding each of these accidental gunshot wounds to determine if such incidents are associated with particular activities. In 54 percent of the cases, the decedent was the primary actor, while in 42

percent of the cases, another person caused the weapon to discharge.<sup>5</sup> In terms of specific activities, 19 percent of the decedents were either involved in training or at a shooting range at the time of their deaths. In addition, 9 percent of the fatalities involved a weapon discharging while the weapon was on the decedent's person. These cases included incidents in which the firearm discharged while being holstered, after it fell from the decedent's clothing, when the decedent adjusted his or her clothing, or when the decedent fell down. Finally, 8 percent of the cases involved firearm maintenance (like cleaning or testing), and 6 percent were caused by playing with a weapon.

## Conclusion

While accidental fatal gunshot wounds represent a relatively small part of the overall occupational fatalities that occurred during the 1993-2002 period, they were responsible for approximately 18 workplace fatalities per year, on average, over that period. Government workers, especially military and police, were particularly vulnerable to this type of fatal work injury.

## Appendix: Technical Note

The BLS [Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries \(CFOI\)](#) has collected and disseminated data on fatal work injuries in the United States since 1992. Many data elements about the decedent and incident are collected, including demographic data (such as the race, gender, and age of the decedent), incident data (such as the event that precipitated the fatality), and employment data (such as the industry and occupation in which the decedent was working at the time of his or her death). In addition, CFOI provides a narrative on each fatal occupational injury.

Two methods were used to compile the data used in this analysis. First, any fatality that had an event code of 0222 (struck by discharged object or substance) and a source code of either 9110 (bullets) or 9130 (pellets) was included.<sup>6</sup> This is the standard method used to code accidental gunshot incidents. Second, cases that could have been considered accidental shootings but were not coded as such were compiled. Several different means were employed to retrieve these cases. For example, for cases in which the source code was 9110 or 9130, the narratives were searched for keywords such as "accident," "intentional," "unintentional," "mistake," "purpose," "clean," "play," and "error." In addition, all records with a source code of either 9110 or 9130 and event codes of 6000 (assaults and violent acts, unspecified), 6100 (assaults and violent acts by a person or persons unspecified), 6190 (assaults and violent acts by a person or persons, not elsewhere classified), 6200 (self-inflicted injury, unspecified), and 6220 (self-inflicted injury, intent unknown) were examined. Finally, all records with a source code of 9100 (ammunition, unspecified), 9120 (explosive devices), or 9190 (ammunition, not elsewhere classified) were examined. Fatal work injuries caused by the accidental discharge of heavy weapons, like cannons, were excluded from this analysis.

Records that were not originally coded as accidental gunshot wounds but whose narratives indicate that the shooting was accidental were recoded for this analysis. A total of 45 records were added to the total number of accidental gunshot fatalities in this manner. Determining whether a case was accidental or not was sometimes made more difficult by a vague or incomplete narrative. In such cases the author, with input from other CFOI staff members, made the final decision on the basis of a consistent set of criteria.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The 2002 data used in this analysis are preliminary.

<sup>2</sup> In this study the racial categories "White" and "Black or African American" do not include persons from the ethnic category "Hispanic or Latino." In the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI), persons of Hispanic or Latino origin may identify themselves racially as white, black, or another race category.

<sup>3</sup> The CFOI data used in this analysis are classified by industry according to the 1987 Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system. For more information on the SIC system, see *Standard Industrial Classification Manual: 1987* (Office of Management and Budget, 1987). The CFOI data are classified by occupation according to the 1990 Census Bureau occupation codes. For more information on the 1990 Census

Bureau codes, see "The Relationship Between the 1990 Census and Census 2000 Industry and Occupation Classification Systems, Technical Paper #65," (U.S. Census Bureau, October 30, 2003); available on the Internet at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/ioindex/pdfio/techpaper2000.pdf>.

4 Under the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system, the national security industry, which includes the four branches of the military, the National Guard, and military training schools, is coded 9711. For more information, see *Standard Industrial Classification Manual: 1987* (Office of Management and Budget, 1987).

5 The remaining seven cases either had no actor or the circumstances were too vague to assign an actor. For cases in which the narrative describing the fatality was written in the passive voice (for example, "the decedent was shot") and no other information on the actor was available, the actor was assumed to be another person.

6 These event and source codes are taken from the BLS [Occupational Injury and Illness Classification System \(OIICS\)](#). For more information, see the *Occupational Injury and Illness Classification Manual* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 1992); available on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/oiicm.pdf>.

**Table. Fatal occupational injuries to all workers from accidental gunshot wounds by selected characteristics, 1993-2002**

Characteristics	Number of Fatalities
<b>Total</b>	175
Employee status	
<b>Wage and salary workers(1)</b>	139
<b>Self-employed(2)</b>	36
Sex	
<b>Men</b>	164
<b>Women</b>	11
Age	
<b>18 to 19 years</b>	10
<b>20 to 24 years</b>	26
<b>25 to 34 years</b>	47
<b>35 to 44 years</b>	43
<b>45 to 54 years</b>	23
<b>55 to 64 years</b>	14
<b>65 and over</b>	7
Race or ethnic origin (3)	
<b>White</b>	120
<b>Black or African American</b>	21
<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	27
<b>Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander</b>	6
Occupation	

Footnotes:

- (1) This category may include volunteers and other workers receiving compensation.
- (2) Includes paid and unpaid family workers, and may include owners of incorporated businesses or members of partnerships.
- (3) In this study, the racial categories "White" and "Black or African American" do not include persons from the ethnic category "Hispanic or Latino." Hispanic or Latino persons may identify themselves racially as white, black, or another race category.
- (4) Includes resident armed forces.
- (5) Includes fatalities to workers employed in governmental organizations regardless of industry.

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

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

Characteristics	Number of Fatalities
<b>Managerial and professional specialty</b>	12
<b>Technical, sales, and administrative support</b>	26
<b>Sales occupations</b>	20
<b>Service occupations</b>	47
<b>Protective services occupations</b>	38
<b>Police and detectives, public services</b>	24
<b>Guards, including supervisors</b>	13
<b>Farming, forestry, and fishing</b>	29
<b>Farming operators and managers</b>	16
<b>Precision production, craft, and repair</b>	13
<b>Operators, fabricators, and laborers</b>	20
<b>Military(4)</b>	26
Industry	
<b>Private industry</b>	116
<b>Agriculture, forestry, and fishing</b>	28
<b>Retail trade</b>	30
<b>Services</b>	26
<b>Government(5)</b>	59
<b>Federal government</b>	28
<b>Public administration</b>	28
<b>National security and international affairs</b>	26
<b>National security</b>	26
<b>Local government</b>	27
<b>Public administration</b>	25
<b>Justice, public order, and safety</b>	22
<b>Public order and safety</b>	22
<b>Police protection</b>	19
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(3) In this study, the racial categories "White" and "Black or African American" do not include persons from the ethnic category "Hispanic or Latino." Hispanic or Latino persons may identify themselves racially as white, black, or another race category.	
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