

LOGGING FATALITIES IN THE UNITED STATES: AN UPDATE

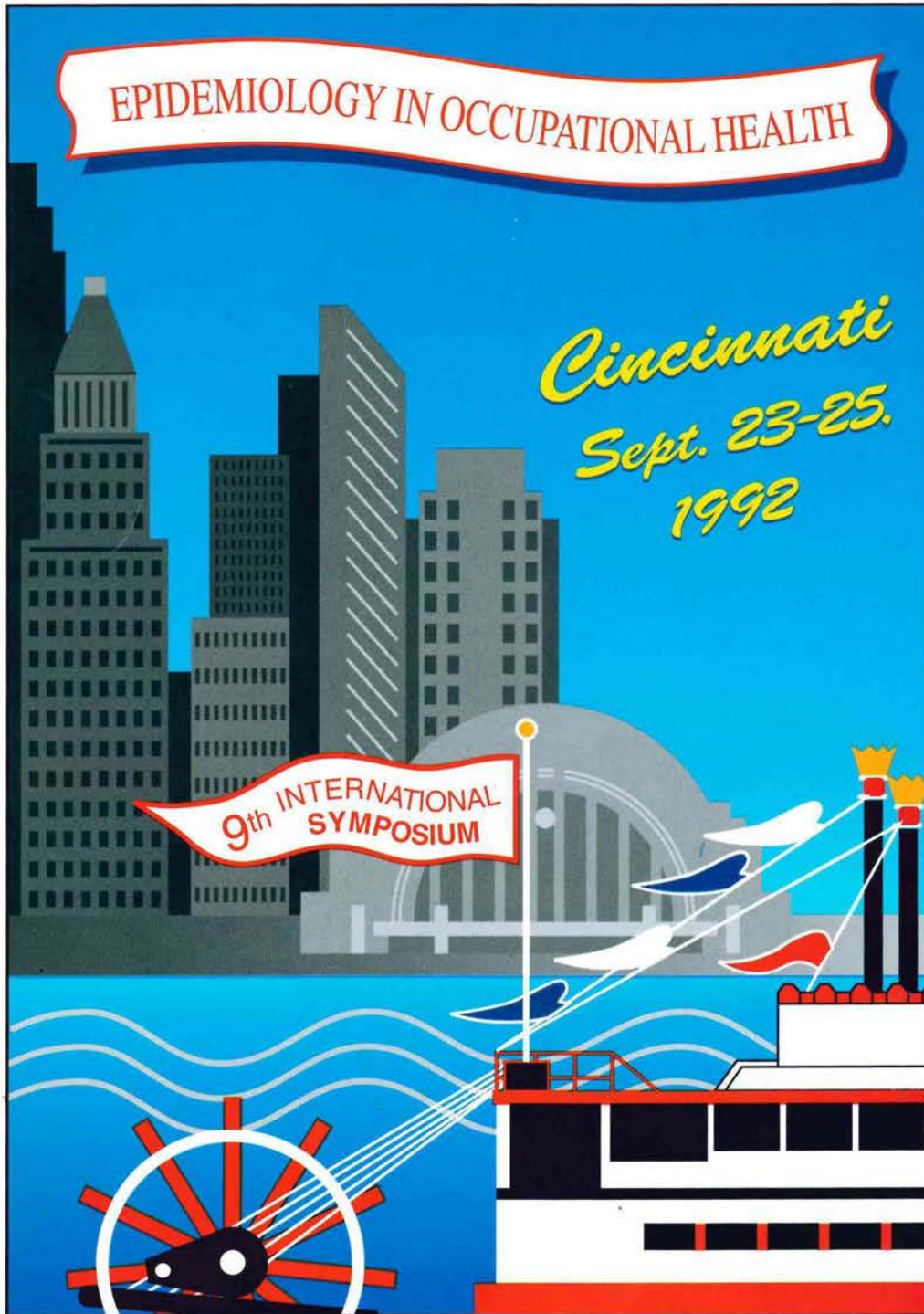
D.E. FOSBROKE AND J.R. MYERS

David E. FOSBROKE, John R. MYERS: NIOSH, 944 Chestnut Ridge Road, Morgantown, West Virginia 26505, USA.

Forests provide the U.S. population with a variety of products ranging from paper and lumber to chemicals and synthetics, such as rayon. Each of these products originates with the harvesting, skidding, loading and transport of timber by workers in the logging industry. Traditionally, this industry has been one of the most dangerous in the country; the dangers stem from factors which are unique to logging. Trees are typically felled with a chainsaw, requiring loggers to work in close proximity to standing and falling timber. Shifts in weight or wind often cause trees to fall in unexpected directions. Steep terrain, underbrush, uneven footing, powerful equipment, and inclement weather add additional risks for loggers, equipment operators and other workers at logging sites. This study examines the distribution of logging fatalities by cause of death and region of the country using the National Traumatic Occupational Fatality (NTOF) surveillance system maintained by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. NTOF data show that an average of 142 non-managerial logging workers died of work-related injuries each year from 1980 through 1988. Though the Pacific Coast pine/hardwood and the southern pine regions had the most fatalities (38 percent and 37 percent of the total number of U.S. fatalities, respectively), they also have the most logging activity, representing over two-thirds of the nation's timber production. The highest fatality rates were in the central hardwood and the eastern hardwood regions. Fatality rates in the mountain pine, Pacific Coast, plains bottomlands and southern pine regions were intermediate. The lowest fatality rates were in the Lake States pine/hardwood and in the northern hardwood/spruce/fir regions. Logging deaths were slightly higher than average in the 25-to 44-year age group. Logging occupations (e.g. fellers, buckers, choke setters) accounted for 65.6 percent of fatalities in the industry. Truck drivers and miscellaneous laborers represented an additional 11 and 8 percent of the deaths. The leading cause of death was being struck by falling objects (49.8 percent). Machinery-related (14.5 percent) and motor vehicle related-incidents (14.3 percent) were the next most common causes of death. Differences in forest type and harvesting operations are hypothesized to account for differences in regional fatality rates.

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