

# Introduction

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Workers' compensation systems in the U.S. have grown complex since their initiation a century ago. All U.S. states (except Texas) require workers' compensation insurance coverage by nearly all employers. Each jurisdiction mandates that workers' compensation programs create reports for workplace injuries and illnesses and each state has an agency that collects at least a portion of these reports.

Standardized workers' compensation claims and program related information for a large portion of the states are also collected by industry organizations. Additionally, the workers' compensation insurance industry loss prevention programs generate records on employer risks and hazards. These resources on injuries, illnesses, hazards and other risks have yet to be fully utilized for occupational safety and health research and surveillance.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose for the June 2012 Use of Workers' Compensation Data for Occupational Safety and Health Workshop was to continue to explore ways in which workers' compensation information can be used for these purposes. The National Academies has called for greater use of surveillance data in order to identify priorities, focus resources and evaluate prevention program effectiveness.

Six white papers were drafted for the workshop and discussed in breakout groups. At the meeting, thirty-five poster and platform presentations described studies that utilized workers' compensation information while exploring limitations of these resources. These workshop proceedings contain summary articles for the presentations<sup>2</sup> plus notes from the discussion groups for the 6 white papers.<sup>3</sup>

The workshop was co-sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE), International Association of Industrial Accident Boards and Commissions (IAIABC), National Council on Compensation Insurance (NCCI), National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, Safety and Health Assessment for Research and Prevention (SHARP) program.

Continuing research and surveillance with workers' compensation resources can fill important gaps in our knowledge about workplace hazards and their impact on human health. Despite substantial differences among states, many public health and workers' compensation organizations are pursuing these opportunities (Appendix A). Everyone involved can help insure that the records for this complex industry are complete and accurate in order to maximize their potential use for protecting public interests.

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<sup>1</sup>Proceedings from the first workshop are available at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-152/>

<sup>2</sup>Abstracts only appear for 5 articles that have been or are being published in peer-review journals.

<sup>3</sup>The white papers will be published in a peer-review journal.

# Use of Workers' Compensation Data for Occupational Safety and Health: Proceedings from June 2012 Workshop

Department of Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health



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**David F. Utterback and Teresa M. Schnorr, Editors**

Department of Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

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## Foreword

The Use of Workers' Compensation Data for Occupational Safety and Health Workshop was convened in June 2012 at the Frances Perkins Department of Labor Building in Washington DC. This was the second workshop that provided an opportunity for workers' compensation insurance industry organizations, public health practitioners and researchers, and government administrative agencies to discuss uses of workers' compensation data for public health issues.

The burden of occupational injuries, illnesses and fatalities is substantial. In the U.S. alone, costs are estimated at \$250 billion annually (Leigh 2011). Tracking these costs and underlying hazards is essential for control of the economic and social burdens.

Workers' compensation insurance covers but a fraction of these costs, although nearly all employers are required by the individual state mandates to have policies. Seemingly, claims records would be available for each incident yet investigators report at this workshop and elsewhere that the records are incomplete.

Collaboration across the vested interests is needed to make workers' compensation data more suitable for research and surveillance purposes. In combination with other occupational safety and health resources, further utilization of workers' compensation data can help alleviate the burden of occupational injuries and illnesses in the U.S. and elsewhere.



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Leigh JP (2011) Economic burden of occupational injury and illness in the United States. *Milbank Q.* 2011 Dec;89(4):728-72. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0009.2011.00648.x.



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