6th WORLD CONFERENCE

Injury Prevention and Control

6e CONFÉRENCE MONDIALE

Prévention et contrôle des traumatismes

ABSTRACTS • RÉSUMÉS

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MAY 12 TO 15, 2002

Montreal Convention Center

DU 12 AU 15 MAI 2002

Palais des Congrès de Montréal

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INJURIES, SUICIDE AND VIOLENCE:
Building Knowledge, Policies
and Practices to Promote a Safer World

TRAUMATISMES, SUICIDE ET VIOLENCE :
Construire un savoir, des politiques
et des pratiques pour promouvoir
un monde en sécurité

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isbn : 2-7606-1845-5

Imprimé au Canada

NIOSH'S SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM FOR SURVEILLANCE AND PREVENTION OF OCCUPATIONAL INJURIES IN ALASKA

GEORGE A. CONWAY, JENNIFER M. LINCOLN, BRADLEY J. HUSBERG,
JAN C. MANWARING, DIANA M. BENSYL, RICHARD P. KELLY, DIANA S. HUDSON
CDC/NIOSH Alaska Field Station
Anchorage, Alaska, USA

PROBLEM UNDER STUDY: During 1980-1989, Alaska experienced 34.8 traumatic deaths for every 100,000 workers employed in the state, the highest-risk state in the U.S., and five-times the national rate of 7.0 per 100,000. In response, the National Institute for and Health (NIOSH) set out to understand and prevent these injuries, setting up its Alaska Field Station in Anchorage in 1991.

OBJECTIVES: To describe, understand risk factors, and organize efforts to prevent occupational injuries in Alaska.

METHOD OR APPROACH: We established comprehensive occupational injury surveillance for Alaska, obtaining information via data-sharing with jurisdictional agencies and from direct on-site investigation of incidents. We also formed and facilitated interagency working groups (of state and federal agencies and industry groups) to address major factors leading to occupational death and injury in the state focusing on the helicopter logging, commercial fishing and aviation industries.

RESULTS: From 1990 through 2000, 700 Alaskan workers died from job-related injuries: 225 commercial fishermen, 117 civilian pilots, 47 military personnel, 30 loggers, and 25 deckhands. They died from drowning (229), in aircraft crashes (209), by being crushed (63), from intentional injuries (49), in motor vehicle crashes (36), and from falls (29). Many of these deaths were among young people, resulting in over 18,500 worker years of potential life lost before age 65. Since 1990, Alaska has experienced a 45 percent overall decline (from an average of 83 deaths from 1990-1992 to an average of 46 deaths from 1998-2000) in work-related deaths, including a 62 percent decline in commercial fishing deaths, and a very sharp decline in helicopter logging-related deaths. Thus, from 1990-1992, one worker died from work-related injuries every 41/2 days (on average); while from 1998-2000, one died every 8 days (on average). The three occupations that experienced the greatest reductions in work-related deaths and contributed the most to the overall decline in Alaska's occupational fatalities were: commercial fishermen (34 13) (1990-1992 avg: 1998-2000 avg.); aircraft pilots (11 8)(1990-1992 avg: 1998-2000 avg.); and loggers (4 2)(1990-1992 avg: 1998-2000 avg.). These are also the three occupations that historically have had the highest fatality rates in Alaska and the occupations on which interagency/industry efforts were most focused. A concerted effort by many individuals, industries, and agencies is responsible for this impressive reduction in the number of work-related deaths in Alaska this decade. For example, the successes in commercial fishing are due in part to the U.S. Coast Guard implementing new safety requirements in the early 1990s. These safety requirements contributed to 93 percent of the commercial fishermen surviving vessel sinkings/capsizings in 1998, whereas in 1991, only 73 percent survived. Another impressive success has been in helicopter logging: crashes in that emerging industry killed 10 Alaskan workers (pilots, co-pilots, and

loggers) during 1992-1993, but an interagency effort led to improvements in regulatory oversight, convening helicopter logging safety workshops, and formulating and disseminating safety recommendations. Since the first helicopter logging safety workshop in 1994, an international helicopter logging safety committee has been formed, and Alaska has only experienced one additional helicopter logging-related fatality through 2000. These efforts have lead to major national and international government-industry collaborative efforts in improving safety in helicopter lift operations.

CONCLUSION: Using surveillance data as information for action, collaborative efforts have contributed to reducing Alaska's high occupational fatality rate.

LIMITS: Primarily those imposed by availability of financial and personnel resources.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE PROJECT TO THE FIELD: The success of applied surveillance and collaborative government/industry efforts in the difficult conditions of Alaska suggest that extending such a focused approach to other areas, and application of these strategies to the entire spectrum of occupational injury and disease hazards, could have a broad impact toward reducing occupational injuries in other regions.