



# THE IHS PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER

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## NIOSH Launches Worker Safety and Health Initiative for American Indians and Alaska Natives

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In 2013, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) launched an initiative to partner with American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities, organizations, and partners to provide occupational safety and health (OSH) support. NIOSH, part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), conducts research and makes recommendations to protect the safety and health of the nation's 155 million workers.<sup>1</sup> NIOSH is not a regulatory agency and has no enforcement authority. NIOSH collaborates with diverse stakeholders to understand how worker injuries, illnesses, and deaths occur and then implement practical workplace solutions. The purpose of this article is to summarize what is known about safety and health issues among AI/AN workers and to describe the NIOSH initiative to enhance OSH in tribal communities.

### **Fatal Occupational Injuries to American Indian/Alaska Native Workers, 2003 - 2010**

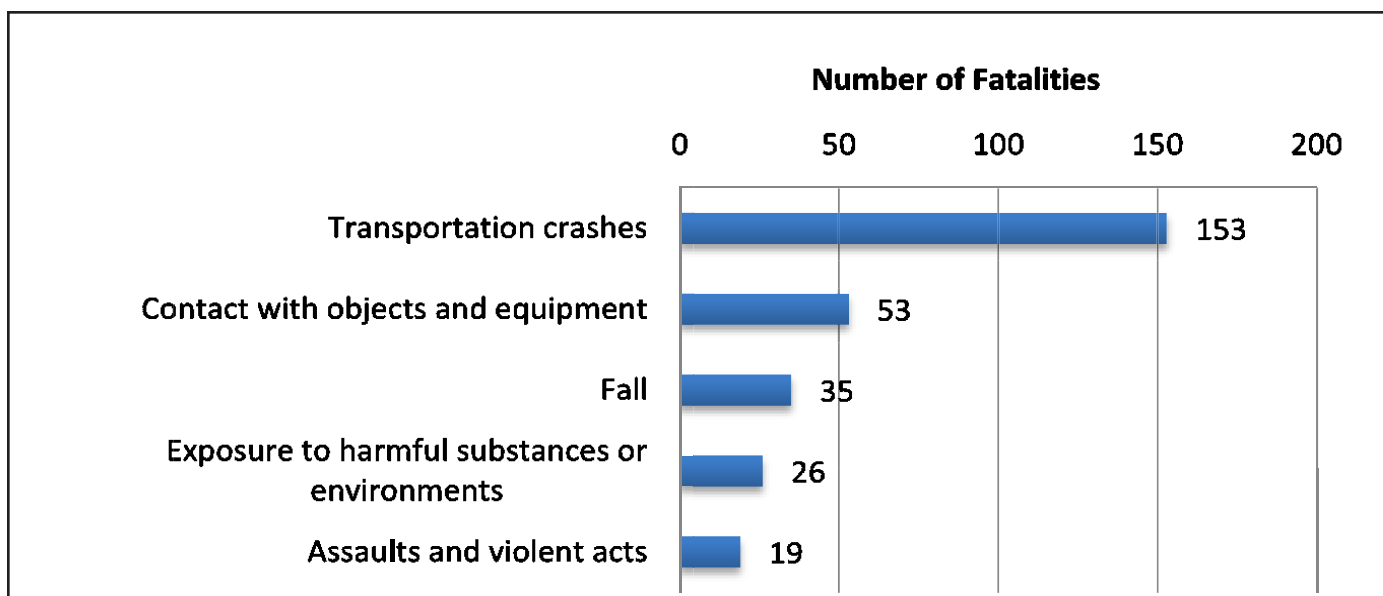
NIOSH analyzed data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) Program, which collects information on all work-related fatalities and is the most comprehensive source for data on workplace fatalities in the US. According to the BLS, there were 292 AI/AN workers killed on the job during 2003 - 2010 — an average of 37 fatalities each year (see Figures 1 and 2). Most of those fatalities occurred to male workers (272, 93%). The industries

with the most fatalities were construction (66), agriculture/forestry/fishing (47), and transportation and warehousing (32). The leading cause of work-related fatality was transportation crashes, which resulted in more than half of all deaths to AI/AN workers (153, 52%). More than half of all work-related fatalities occurred in the following six states: Oklahoma (39), Arizona (30), Alaska (25), Washington (21), California (20), and New Mexico (17). It is important to note that, although the CFOI data are the most comprehensive

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**Figure 1. Most Common Fatal Events to AI/AN Workers, 2003 - 2010**



source for information on workplace fatalities, there is still a need for additional data with more detail. For example, CFI data do not identify fatal events that occur on a reservation or other tribal lands, and tribal affiliation is not collected.

### NIOSH Initiative

The main goal of the NIOSH initiative is to maximize resources to build and strengthen OSH capacity in tribal communities. NIOSH has developed an action plan that entails close collaboration with partners to determine how best to implement the AI/AN initiative and provide OSH support. Activities are coordinated with the CDC Office of State, Territorial, Local and Tribal Support (OSTLTS), Associate Director for Tribal Support. Activities are underway to assess what resources are currently dedicated to addressing OSH issues among AI/AN. Consultations with tribal government will be organized to understand and describe the OSH needs of the AI/AN population and to identify priority OSH issues, including surveillance needs. NIOSH will seek to establish a workgroup or council that includes internal and external representatives/partners, based on consultation with tribal governments. NIOSH aims to organize face-to-face meetings with key tribal representatives (preferably at organized conferences or meetings) and to be able to develop a research and technical assistance agenda to help address AI/AN OSH priorities. Based on consultation with tribal governments, NIOSH intends to conduct one or more pilot technical assistance project(s) to evaluate approaches for working with the AI/AN community and resource commitments and to

develop a communication strategy and communication products.

All research activities will honor the unique government-to-government relationship that exists between the US and all federally-recognized tribes.

### What can NIOSH contribute/provide?

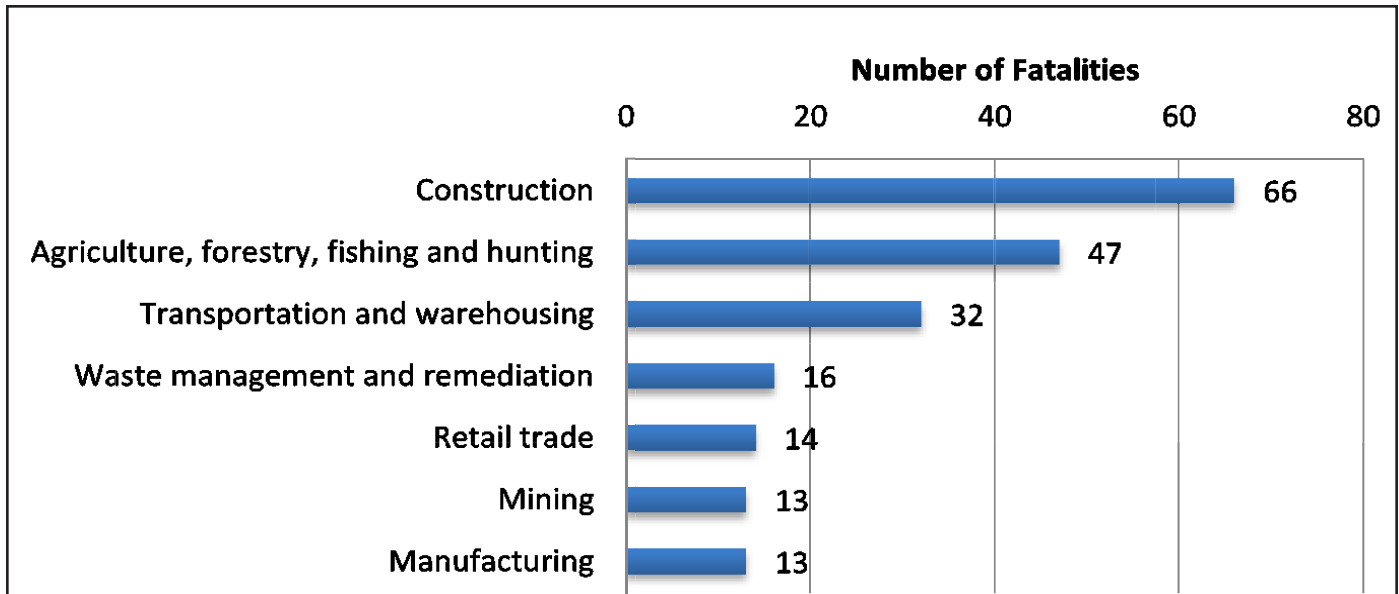
NIOSH can provide technical expertise in OSH through field studies and investigations, conduct health hazard evaluations (HHEs) and fatality investigations, and provide resources on specific OSH topics. NIOSH can facilitate this effort and organize a workgroup or council for the initiative. Other potential activities may include developing communication products that address priority OSH issues.

### How to get involved with this initiative?

You can assist by informing tribes and tribal organizations about the initiative. You can encourage those responsible for protecting AI/AN workers to partner with NIOSH, and you can report AI/AN worker safety and health issues to NIOSH. See contact information below. Your participation and collaboration will help NIOSH in furthering this initiative.

For more information, and to partner with NIOSH, please contact Edgar Reyes, Senior Safety Engineer, telephone (303) 236-5954; e-mail [uwn7@cdc.gov](mailto:uwn7@cdc.gov); or Elizabeth Dalsey, Health Communications Specialist, telephone (303) 236-5955; e-mail [fef2@cdc.gov](mailto:fef2@cdc.gov). You may also visit the NIOSH web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/NIOSH>.

Figure 2. Fatal Occupational Injuries to AI/AN Workers by Industry, 2003 - 2010



#### References

1. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey 2012, <http://bls.gov/cps/>.
2. Leigh JP. Economic burden of occupational injury and illness in the United States, *Millbank Q.* 2011; 89:728-72.
3. Indian Entities Recognized and Eligible to Receive Services from the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, Federal Register 78:87 (May 6, 2013), pp. 26384-26389.
4. Knowing Tribal Health, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, <http://www.astho.org>.
5. Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries. Note: Includes fatalities in most frequent (private) industry only (n=251). There were an additional 51 fatalities to AI/AN workers employed by state or federal government.