

Letters to the Editor

Readers are invited to submit letters for publication in this department. Submit them to: The Editor, Journal of Occupational Medicine, PO Box 370, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010. Letters should be typewritten on double spaced and should be designated "For Publication."

Classifying Deaths as On the Job

To the Editor: The article by Runyan et al¹ stresses the need for standard guidelines for determining whether injury deaths are "occupational." Recognizing the growing importance of death certificate surveillance of fatal occupational injuries, and recognizing the lack of standardization and guidelines for determining the work-relatedness of fatal injury cases, several organizations undertook a collaborative effort during 1991–1992 to develop such guidelines. The Association for Vital Records and Health Statistics (AVRHS), the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), and the National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) worked together, in consultation with other agencies such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, to achieve the common goal of developing nationally standardized, operational guidelines for determining whether a fatal injury occurred at work. Our objective was to develop guidelines that (1) could be used by medical examiners and coroners in the accurate completion of the "injury at work" item on death certificates, (2) were consistent with current case definitions of fatal occupational injuries, (3) would be both clear and concise (no more than one page in length), and (4) would meet the needs of the occupational safety and health community for surveillance

and research aimed at preventing injuries on the job.

This collaborative effort resulted in the enclosed Operational Guidelines for Determination of Injury at Work. These guidelines were distributed to state vital registrars in June 1992 at the annual meeting and in the newsletter of AVRHS, for dissemination to medical examiners and coroners within each state. In addition, beginning in 1993, the "injury at work" item on death certificates became one of the required elements to be reported by states to the NCHS as part of the national vital statistics mortality data. NCHS recommends adherence to these guidelines for the accurate completion of this item. We consider these guidelines to be evolving, and anticipate revisions as we learn from their implementation. We welcome feedback from users.

The widespread use of these standard guidelines, in the completion of US death certificates and as the standard case definition of fatal occupational injury cases in national surveillance systems, results in continuing improvement in the consistency and standardization of the definition of "injury at work."

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Reference

1. Runyan CW, Loomis D, Butts J. Practices of count medical examiners in classifying deaths as on the job. *J Occup Med.* 1994;36:36–41.

Electrothermal Ring Burn

To the Editor: Injuries involving rings and the ring finger are encountered in both the occupational and non-occupational setting. Wearing rings in certain occupational settings may predispose to serious injury and in many situations wearing rings or other jewelry is inadvisable. Most attention has been focused on injuries involving the ring catching in machinery or being caught during a fall. A recent injury seen in our clinic illustrates a type of injury which has been discussed infrequently.

A 49-year-old mechanic was working on a truck battery. The wrench he was using to work on a terminal slipped and his ring contacted the metal frame of the car. He immediately noticed a searing hot pain around the ring area on his left ring finger and took the ring off as fast as he could. A co-worker nearby attempted to retrieve the ring and was unable to handle it because it was very hot. The worker had pain for a few hours which gradually subsided. He went home and had an uneventful night.

At the request of his employer he was seen in our clinic approximately 18 hours later at which time he had no complaints of pain. Examination revealed normal neurologic and vascular function distal to the injury.