

New figures show a fall in work-related ill health and a mixed picture for injuries

Figures published today by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) show an increase in the number of reported workplace injuries, which could reflect improved reporting, and a decline in new cases of work-related ill health. The most significant improvements have occurred in areas where health and safety inspection, enforcement, advice and partnership working have been most evident.

The figures show:

- There were 235 fatal injuries to workers in 2003/04, an increase of 4% on the 2002/03 figure of 227. Around half occurred in two industries: construction; and agriculture, forestry and fishing.
- The number of reported major injuries to employees (see definitions in Notes to Editors) was 30,666 in 2003/04, up 9% on the previous year, with increases in many service industries, notably public administration. Over a third of all reported major injuries were caused by slipping and tripping.
- The number of reported over-3-day injuries to employees increased by 0.7% in 2003/04 to 129,143 of which two-fifths were caused by handling, lifting and carrying.
- In 2003/04 an estimated 2.2 million people suffered from ill health which they thought was work-related, similar to the level in 2001/02 (2.3 million). Around three-quarters of the cases of work-related ill health were musculoskeletal disorders (such as back pain), or stress. New cases of musculoskeletal disorders were lower in 2003/04 than in 2001/02.
- The number of prosecutions by the HSE was up by 6% on the previous year.
- For working days lost per 100,000 workers, the figures for 2003/04 show no statistically significant change since 2000/02, the closest available to the Revitalising Health and Safety base year.

Commenting on the figures, Health and Safety Commission Chair Bill Callaghan said:

"I believe that sensible health and safety is a cornerstone of a civilised society and, therefore, we must continue to attack these unacceptably high levels of occupational injuries and ill health. Our new Strategy, launched earlier this year, is key. It builds on initiatives successfully developed by HSE and local authorities over recent years and places emphasis on partnership working as the route to further improvements.

"The messages that these statistics present are mixed. On the one hand, we still cannot point to clear evidence of progress against our Revitalising Health and Safety targets. On the other hand there are welcome signs on ill health: a downturn in musculoskeletal disorders and a levelling off in the earlier rise in work-related stress. But since ill health accounts for around three-quarters of working days lost, there is still a lot of work to do.

"We remain committed to the Revitalising Health and Safety targets as representing the improvements we want to see. While the Commission and Executive have a pivotal role to play, we need to continue to work in partnership with others, including industry, unions and local authorities, if we are to substantially reduce the rate of workplace ill health and injuries."

Justin McCracken, Deputy Director General of HSE, said: "There are some very welcome indications that our various initiatives are beginning to bear fruit. In particular, I'm pleased to

see reductions in the rate of major injury in the production industries, especially construction, the extractive industries and manufacturing. These are all industries that we have targeted and have worked to get the right mix of interventions - inspection, investigation and enforcement on the one hand, and information, advice and education on the other. Each sector requires a different mix of interventions to get the best results and one challenge we and our local authority partners face is getting this balance right."

Copies of 'Health and Safety Statistics Highlights 2003/04' [650kb] are free and can be ordered from the Statistics Co-ordination Unit, Health and Safety Executive, Room 462, Magdalen House, Bootle, Merseyside L20 3QZ, tel: 0151 951 3479/4355, fax: 0151 951 3785. A National Statistics/HSE press notice (E161:04) giving details of the statistics.