

Key Work Health and Safety Statistics, Australia



safe work australia

2014

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Key work health and safety statistics

- In 2010–11, there were 132 570 workers' compensation claims for serious¹ work-related injuries or illnesses. This equates to an incidence rate of 13.1 serious claims per 1000 employees.
- Preliminary data for 2011–12 show there were 128 050 serious workers' compensation claims, which equates to 12.2 serious claims per 1000 employees. While the final number of accepted claims for the 2011–12 year is likely to be around 2% higher, an improvement from 2010–11 is still expected.
- Per hour worked, male employees had a 25% higher rate of claims for serious injury or disease than female employees.
- Incidence rates of serious workers' compensation claims increase with employee age.
- The highest occupation incidence rates were recorded by Labourers & related workers, over double the rate for all occupations.
- The highest industry incidence rates were recorded by the Transport & storage, Agriculture, forestry & fishing and Manufacturing industries.
- A typical serious workers' compensation claim involves four weeks absence from work.
- One-quarter of serious claims required 12 or more weeks off work.
- One in five serious claims involved an injury to the back.
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics' *Work Related Injury Survey* showed 58 out of every 1000 workers experienced an injury or illness in the workplace in 2009–10. However, half of these incidents involved less than one day or shift absent from work.
- In 2011–12, 228 workers died due to an injury incurred at work. This equates to 1.99 deaths per 100 000 workers.
- Work related injury and illness were estimated to cost \$60.6 billion in the 2008–09 financial year. This represented 4.8% of GDP.

¹ Serious claims involve a death, a permanent incapacity or a temporary incapacity requiring an absence from work of one working week or more

National OHS Strategy 2002–2012

As a step towards achieving its national vision of Australian workplaces free from death, injury and disease, the National OHS Strategy set the following targets:

Injury and musculoskeletal claims

Target: 40% reduction in the incidence of work-related injury by 30 June 2012.

Result: There was a 28% decrease in the injury incidence rate up to 2011–12. Figure 1 shows that the injury target was not met.

Fatalities

Target: 20% reduction in the incidence of compensated work-related fatalities by 30 June 2012.

Result: A 42% decrease was recorded up to 2011–12 which is more than twice the desired result. Figure 2 shows that the fatality target was achieved.

International fatalities

Target: Australia to have the lowest work-related traumatic injury fatality rate in the world by 2009.

Result: While the gap between Australia and the better performing countries has reduced, Figure 3 shows that Australia did not meet the target.

Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012–2022

The Australian Strategy builds on the National OHS Strategy and promotes a vision of healthy, safe and productive working lives. The Australian Strategy includes national targets to:

- reduce the number of worker fatalities by at least 20%
- reduce the incidence rate of claims resulting in one or more weeks off work by at least 30%, and
- reduce the incidence rate of claims for musculoskeletal disorders resulting in one or more weeks off work by at least 30%.

Reporting against these new targets will commence in 2015. A guide to the measurement of the targets is available on the Safe Work Australia website.

Figure 1 Incidence rate of serious claims: achieved versus reduction required to meet target

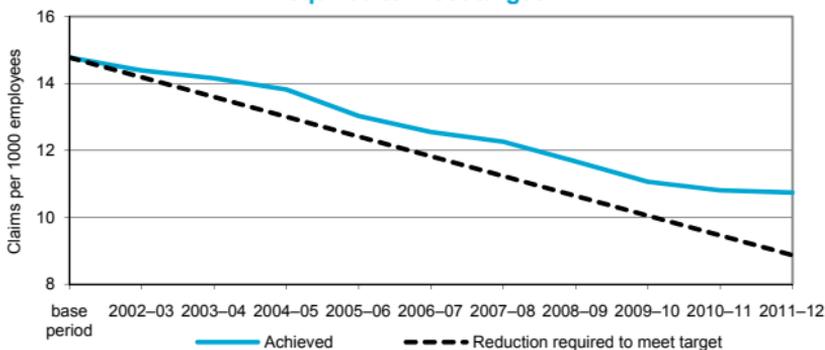


Figure 2 Incidence rate of fatalities: achieved versus reduction required to meet target

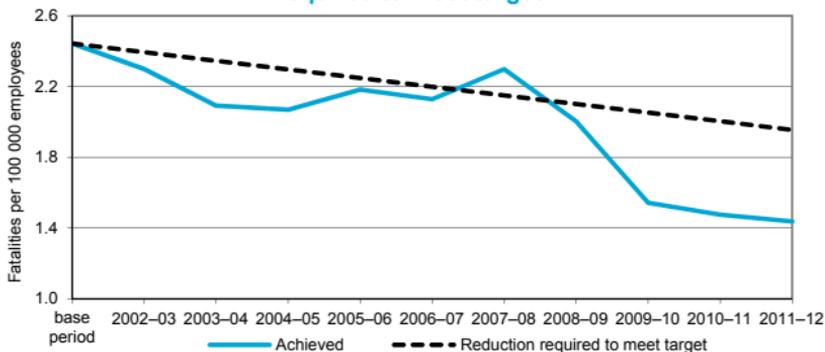
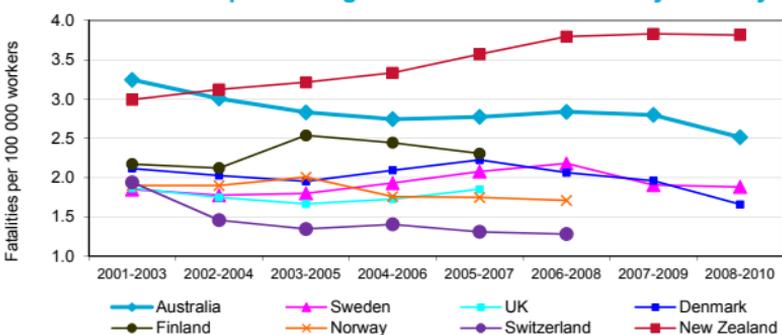


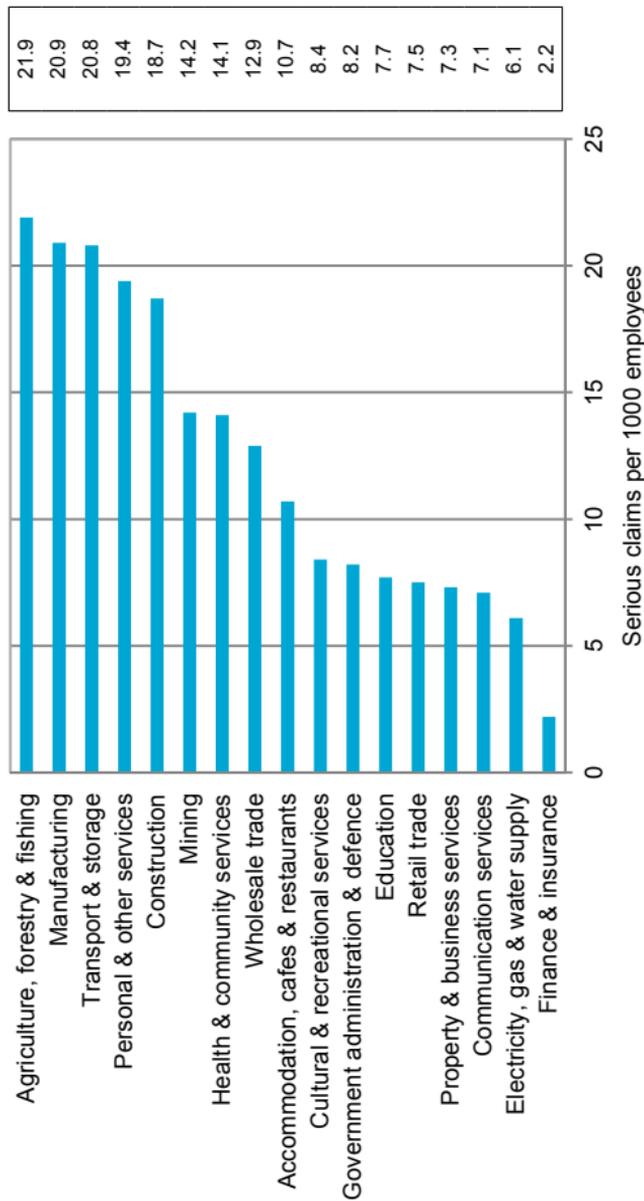
Figure 3 Comparison of Australia's work-related injury fatality rate with the best performing countries standardised by industry



Injury rates by industry

The Agriculture, forestry & fishing; Manufacturing and Transport & storage industries have had the highest incidence rates of serious injury for many years. In 2011–12 their incidence rates were up to 80% higher than the all industries rate of 12.2 serious claims per 1000 employees. These industries together with Construction and Health & community services were priority industries under the National OHS Strategy 2002–2012.

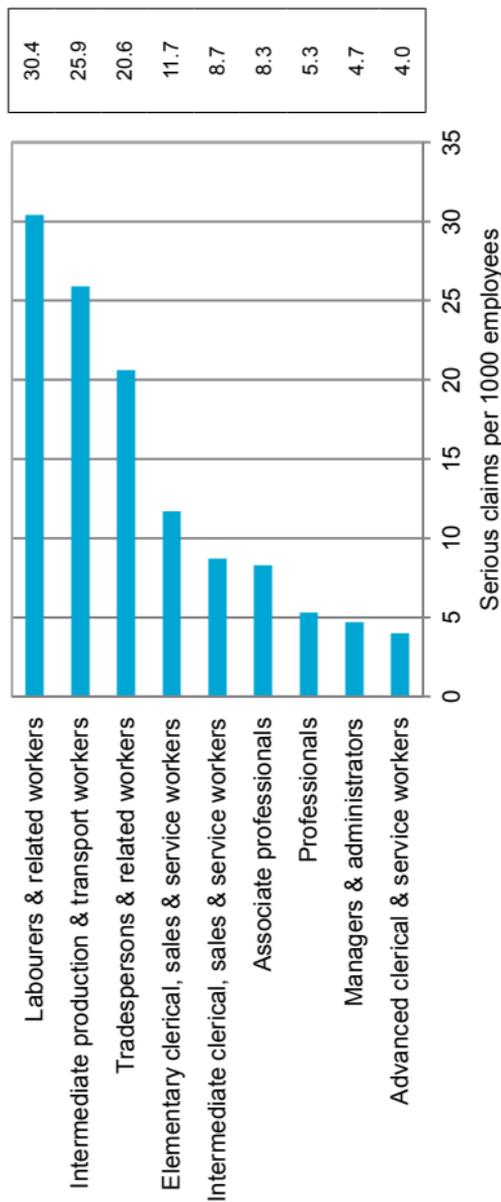
Figure 4 Serious claims: incidence rates by industry, 2011–12p



Injury rates by occupation

The occupations with the highest incidence rates of serious injury are Labourers & related workers; Intermediate production & transport workers and Tradespersons & related workers. These occupation groups have consistently been above the all occupations rate for many years. In 2011–12 Labourers & related workers and Intermediate production & transport workers recorded incidence rates more than twice the all occupations rate of 12.2 serious claims per 1000 employees.

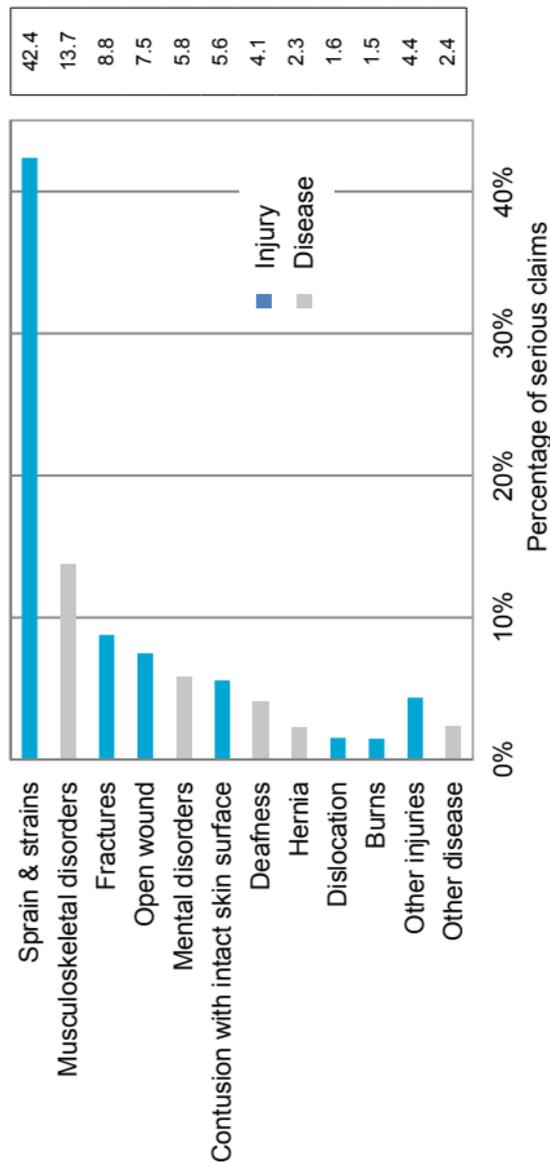
Figure 5 Serious claims: incidence rates by occupation, 2011–12p



Nature of injury or disease

The most common work-related injuries that were compensated were sprains and strains (42.4% of all serious claims). In 2011–12, injury or poisoning accounted for 72% of serious workers' compensation claims with disease claims accounting for the balance. However, the number of disease claims is likely to be an underestimate due to the difficulties associated with linking disease to workplace exposure(s).

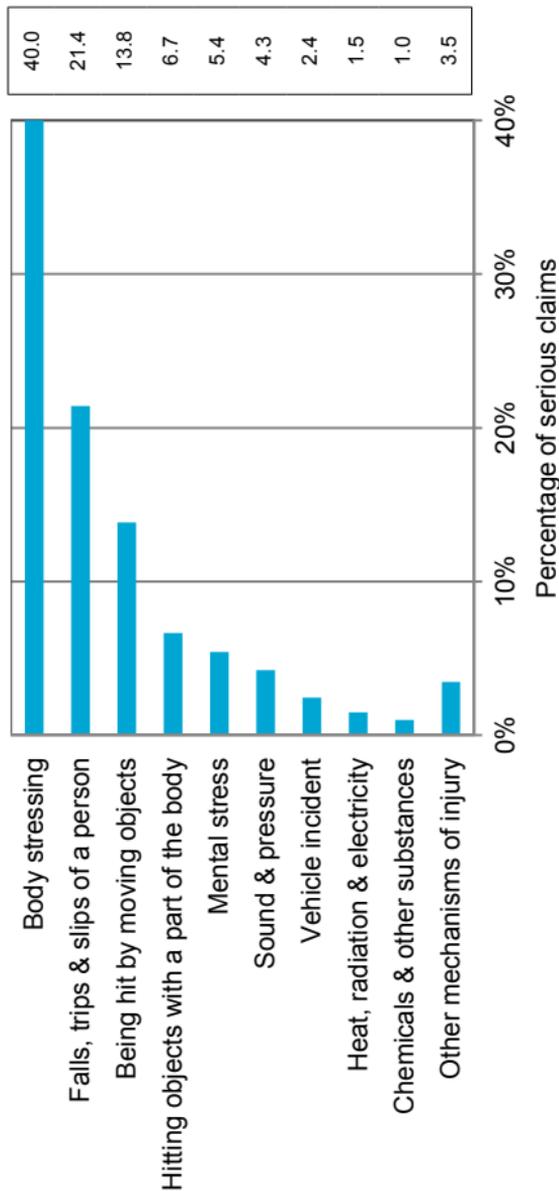
Figure 6 Serious claims: percentage by nature of injury/disease, 2011–12p



How the injury or disease occurred

Body stressing, Falls, trips & slips of a person and Being hit by a moving object were the mechanisms of work-related injury or disease responsible for 75% of serious workers' compensation claims in 2011–12. These mechanisms, together with Hitting objects with a part of the body, were identified as priority mechanisms in the National OHS Strategy 2002–2012. There has been little change in the proportion of claims due to these mechanisms since the National OHS Strategy began.

Figure 7 Serious claims: percentage by mechanism of injury/disease, 2011–12p



Work-related fatalities

- Preliminary workers' compensation data for 2011–12 show there were 199 accepted claims for work-related injury and disease fatalities, down from the 216 recorded for 2010–11. Three-quarters (147) of these fatalities were due to injury with the remainder due to disease.
- Workers' compensation data do not include fatalities where there are no dependants to lodge a claim or where the worker was self-employed. Therefore, workers' compensation data underestimate the total number of work-related fatalities.
- The *Work-related Traumatic Injury Fatalities* report combines information on fatalities from a number of sources but excludes deaths due to disease. The 2011–12 data show there were 228 worker fatalities.
- The 228 worker deaths in 2011–12 is an increase on the previous two years but still substantially lower than the series high of 295 deaths recorded in 2006–07.
- Table 1 shows that the Agriculture, forestry & fishing industry had the highest number of fatalities in 2011–12 (60 deaths) and the highest fatality rate (17.93 deaths per 100 000 workers). This fatality rate is nine times the all industries rate (1.99).
- The Transport, postal and warehousing industry recorded the second highest number of fatalities (51 deaths) and the second highest fatality rate (9.02 deaths per 100 000 workers).
- Table 2 shows that 92 workers died in a *Vehicle incident or rollover* in 2011–12 and a further 30 died due to *Being hit by falling objects*.
- The total number of work-related fatalities due to disease has been conservatively estimated to be at least 2000 deaths per year².
- Recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data show that there were 606 deaths attributed to mesothelioma in 2011. It has been estimated that this number will not peak until after 2014³.

2 Kerr *et al.* 1996. Best Estimate of the Magnitude of Health Effects of Occupational Exposure to Hazardous Substances, Worksafe Australia Developmental Grant Final Report, April 1996.

3 Clements *et al.* 2007. Actuarial projections for mesothelioma: an epidemiological perspective. Presented to the Actuaries of Australia XIth Accident Compensation Seminar.

Table 1 Worker fatalities: number of traumatic injury fatalities and fatality rate (fatalities per 100 000 workers), 2011–12

Industry	Number	Fatality Rate
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	60	17.93
Transport, postal & warehousing	51	9.02
Construction	42	4.11
Manufacturing	20	2.09
Public administration & safety	10	1.27
Wholesale trade	7	1.70
Administrative & support services	6	1.50
Professional, scientific & technical services	6	0.67
Mining	5	2.00
Arts & recreation services	4	1.91
Education & training	4	0.46
Information media & telecommunications	4	1.85
Other industries	9	0.20
All industries	228	1.99

Source: Work-related Traumatic Injury Fatalities database

Table 2 Worker fatalities: number of traumatic injury fatalities by mechanism of injury

Mechanism of injury	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Vehicle incident or rollover	105	85	91
Being hit by falling objects	18	27	30
Being hit by moving objects	23	28	26
Falls from a height	24	27	25
Being trapped between stationary & moving objects	9	13	15
Being hit by an animal	3	4	7
Contact with electricity	13	12	7
Being trapped by moving machinery or equipment	7	11	6
All other mechanisms	20	18	21
Total	222	225	228

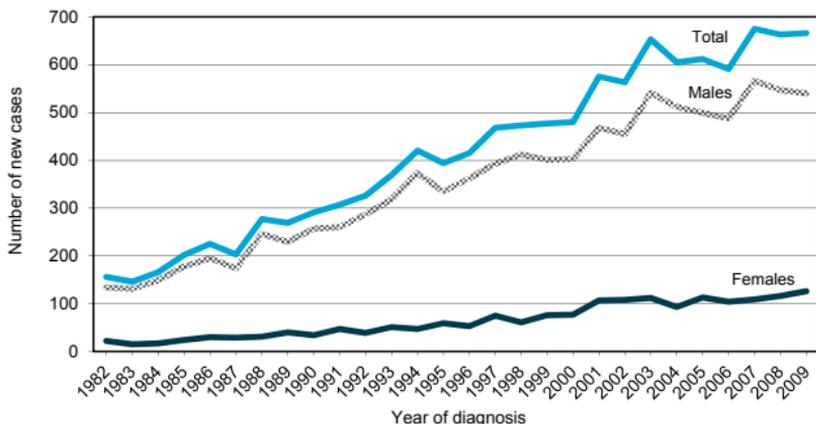
Source: Work-related Traumatic Injury Fatalities database

Mesothelioma

Data on the number of new cases of mesothelioma are collected nationally by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. These data show that:

- The number of new cases of mesothelioma diagnosed increased from 156 in 1982 to a peak of 675 in 2007. In 2009, 666 cases were diagnosed. Based on a number of projections, the incidence of mesothelioma is not expected to peak until after 2014.
- The age standardised rate of new cases of mesothelioma has increased from 1.1 new cases per 100 000 population in 1983 to 2.8 in 2009.
- The majority (80–90%) of mesothelioma cases involve males.

Figure 8 The number of new cases of mesothelioma by sex and year of diagnosis, 1982 to 2009



The Australian Mesothelioma Registry

The Australian Mesothelioma Registry collects information on all mesothelioma cases diagnosed since 1 July 2010. This information includes notifications of new cases of the disease from Australian cancer registries and estimates of the past asbestos exposure of consenting patients. The registry released its second report in 2013 primarily covering mesothelioma cases diagnosed in 2012 but also including some revised figures for 2011 and exposure data since July 2010.

Key findings of the second report include:

- By 30 June 2013, the Registry had been notified of 619 new cases of mesothelioma in 2012. This equates to an incidence rate of 2.4 diagnoses per 100 000 population.
- Males accounted for 83% of notified cases.
- 80% of people diagnosed with mesothelioma were aged 65 years or over.

The report also found that by April 2013, 290 (47%) of the people diagnosed in 2012 had died. Mesothelioma was the cause of death in 96% of the cases.

The Registry has been able to assess the asbestos exposure of 229 patients. These assessments have shown that:

- The jobs with highest asbestos exposure likelihood were construction workers, electricians, plumbers, boiler makers and metal and mechanical tradespersons such as fitters and tuners.
- The most common circumstance of non-occupational exposure was related to home renovation activities. Other sources of exposure included living in a house made mainly of fibro and living in the same home as someone with an asbestos-exposed job who came home dusty.

Occupational disease indicators

- Safe Work Australia identified eight priority occupational disease groups to receive attention under the National OHS Strategy. These disease groups have been chosen because they have a high attribution to the work environment.
- Workers' compensation data are complemented, where possible, by information from other sources⁴ to better identify occupational disease trends.
- Table 3 presents the trends in the incidence of occupational diseases between 2000–01 and 2008–09. Decreasing trends were observed for five of the eight priority disease groups. Noise-induced hearing loss; Respiratory diseases and Occupational cancers did not display a clear overall trend of increase or decrease.

Table 3 Occupational disease indicators: trend from 2000–01 to 2008–09

Trend over time	Occupational Disease
↓	Musculoskeletal disorders
↓	Mental disorders
→	Noise-induced hearing loss
↓	Infectious and parasitic diseases
→	Respiratory diseases
↓	Contact dermatitis
↓	Cardiovascular diseases
→	Occupational cancers

⁴ National Hospital Morbidity Database, National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System, National Cancer Statistics Clearing House.

Jurisdictional comparison

- In 2010–11 the lowest incidence rate of serious workers' compensation claims was recorded by the Australian Government⁵ (Figure 9) with Queensland and Tasmania recording the highest rates. The preliminary data for 2011–12 show a similar pattern.

Figure 9 Incidence of serious claims: jurisdiction by year



- Long term claims are those involving 12 or more weeks of compensation. The lowest rate of long term claims in 2010–11 was recorded by the Australian Government. The highest rate was recorded by the Australian Capital Territory (Figure 10). Preliminary data for 2011–12 should be used with caution as they are likely to increase as shorter-term claims accrue additional time lost.

Figure 10 Incidence of long term claims: jurisdiction by year

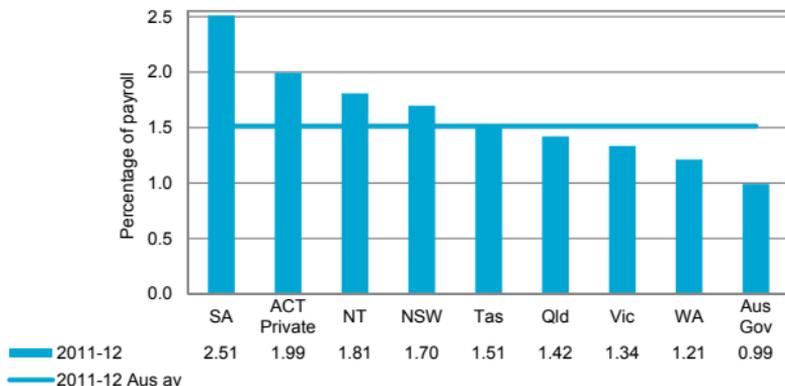


⁵ Australian Government includes all organisations covered by the Comcare workers' compensation scheme.

Premium rates

- The standardised average premium rate⁶ in Australia has decreased 16%, from 1.79% of payroll in 2005-06 to 1.51% in 2011-12.
- Standardised premium rates across the jurisdictions range from 0.99% of payroll in the Australian Government⁷ to 2.51% in South Australia.

Figure 11 Standardised premium rates by jurisdiction, 2011-12



Enforcement

- In 2011-12, 133 935 workplace interventions were undertaken by work health and safety authorities around Australia.
- Authorities issued 50 062 notices made up of 612 infringement notices, 4613 prohibition notices and 44 837 improvement notices.
- Legal proceedings against businesses were finalised in 362 cases and \$22.3 million was handed out in fines by the courts.
- There were 1076 work health and safety inspectors actively inspecting workplaces during 2011-12.

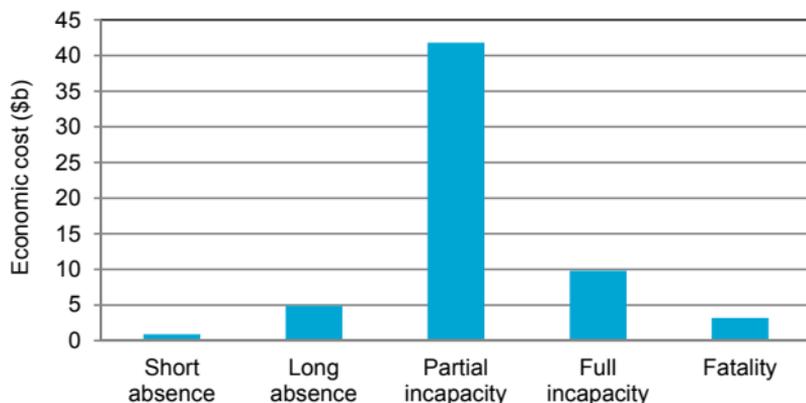
⁶ Standardisation takes into account differences in remuneration, employer excess and journey claim coverage. Figures include self-insurers.

⁷ Premium rates for the Australian Government do not include the ACT government.

Cost of work-related injury and disease

- Work related injury and illness were estimated to cost \$60.6 billion in the 2008–09 financial year. This represented 4.8% of GDP.
- Injuries accounted for 51% of the cost with disease the balance.
- Nearly two-thirds of the cost (74%) was borne by the affected worker with 21% borne by the community and 5% by the employer.
- Figure 12 shows that in 2008–09, 69% of the cost came from partial incapacity incidents where the worker returned to work on reduced duties or a lower income. Around 13% of injuries and illnesses resulted in partial incapacity in 2008–09. A further 16% of costs came from full incapacity where the worker was unable to return to work in any capacity.

Figure 12 Cost of work-related injury and disease by severity, 2008–09



Notes:

The cost estimate includes direct costs (payment of wages and medical costs) and indirect costs (lost productivity, loss of future earnings and social welfare payments).

Under the methodology adopted, workers' compensation premiums are not considered as a cost to the employer but treated as a burden to the community as compensation payments are redistributed to injured and ill workers.

Sources

All workers' compensation statistics regarding claims have been sourced from the National Dataset for Compensation-based Statistics (NDS).

Safe Work Australia produces an annual comprehensive statistical bulletin, the *Compendium of Workers' Compensation Statistics, Australia*, in which many of the national statistics in this booklet can be found. Additional information on fatalities can be found in *Work-related Traumatic Injury Fatalities*.

Jurisdictional data, workers' compensation scheme data and more information on progress towards the *National OHS Strategy 2002–2012* targets is available in the *Comparative Performance Monitoring* (CPM) report.

Information on occupational disease can be found in the publication, *Occupational Disease Indicators*.

Information on Mesothelioma can be found in the publications *Mesothelioma in Australia and Asbestos-related disease indicators*.

Information on the cost of occupational injury and disease can be found in the report *The Cost of Work-related Injury and Illness for Australian Employers, Workers and the Community*.

All of these reports can be found on the Safe Work Australia website at www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au.

Information on the Australian Mesothelioma Registry can be found at www.mesothelioma-australia.com.

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