

## Leading Causes of Disability Among Sheet Metal Workers

### **An analysis of permanent work disability among construction sheet metal workers**

*Gavin H. West, Jaime Dawson, Claire Teitelbaum, Rebecca Novello, Katherine Hunting PhD, and Laura S. Welch MD. American Journal of Industrial Medicine, July 2016.*

#### **Overview**

A substantial number of sheet metal workers retire early due to disability. Researchers analyzed causes of work disability reported in the Sheet Metal Workers' National Pension Fund between 1990 and 2007. Sheet metal workers who received a disability award from the pension fund between 2002 and 2007 (n=1372) were compared to the general working population receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) awards over the same period (n=2,223,357).

#### **Key Findings**

- Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), circulatory disease, and injuries were leading causes of sheet metal worker disability.
- Causes of work disability awards among sheet metal workers differed significantly from the general working population ( $P < 0.0001$ ).
- Sheet metal workers were more likely to receive disability benefits due to an MSD or injury.
- Most sheet metal workers (58%) had at least one MSD contributing to disability.
- Body parts most commonly affected by MSDs among sheet metal workers were the spine, shoulder, and knee.
- Proportionally, sheet metal workers were nearly three times more likely to suffer a disabling injury than members of the general working population.
- Higher proportions of awards caused by MSD or injury among sheet metal workers may reflect higher rates of work-related injuries and MSDs, a high likelihood of disability with construction work given the same impairment, or higher prevalence of other conditions in the general population. Regardless of the reason for these differences, MSDs were found to be a leading cause of disability among sheet metal workers, highlighting the need for task-specific ergonomic innovations and proven participatory interventions.

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#### **See abstract:**

<http://bit.ly/1ppWgsQ>

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