



Highlights of [GAO-10-10](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, the Department of Labor's (DOL) Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is responsible for protecting the safety and health of the nation's workers. The act requires DOL to collect and compile work-related injury and illness data. GAO was asked to determine (1) whether DOL verifies that employers are accurately recording workers' injuries and illnesses and, if so, the adequacy of these efforts, and (2) what factors may affect the accuracy of employers' injury and illness records. GAO analyzed OSHA's audits of employers' injury and illness records, interviewed inspectors who conducted the audits, surveyed occupational safety and health practitioners, and obtained the views of various stakeholders regarding factors that may affect the accuracy of the data.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Secretary of Labor direct OSHA to (1) require inspectors to interview workers during records audits, and substitute other workers when those initially selected are unavailable; (2) minimize the time between the date injuries and illnesses are recorded by employers and the date they are audited; (3) update the list of high hazard industries used to select worksites for records audits; and (4) increase education and training to help employers better understand the recordkeeping requirements. OSHA agreed with these recommendations.

View [GAO-10-10](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Revae Moran (202) 512-7215 or moranr@gao.gov.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH

Enhancing OSHA's Records Audit Process Could Improve the Accuracy of Worker Injury and Illness Data

What GAO Found

DOL verifies some of the workplace injury and illness data it collects from employers through OSHA's audits of employers' records, but these efforts may not be adequate. OSHA overlooks information from workers about injuries and illnesses because it does not routinely interview them as part of its records audits. OSHA annually audits the records of a representative sample of about 250 of the approximately 130,000 worksites in the high hazard industries it surveys to verify the accuracy of the data on injuries and illnesses recorded by employers. However, OSHA does not always require inspectors to interview workers about injuries and illnesses—the only source of data not provided by employers—which could assist them in evaluating the accuracy of the records. In addition, some OSHA inspectors reported they rarely learn about injuries and illnesses from workers since the records audits are conducted about 2 years after incidents are recorded. Moreover, many workers are no longer employed at the worksite and therefore cannot be interviewed. OSHA also does not review the accuracy of injury and illness records for worksites in eight high hazard industries because it has not updated the industry codes used to identify these industries since 2002. OSHA officials told GAO they have not updated the industry codes because it would require a regulatory change that is not currently an agency priority. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) also collects data on work-related injuries and illnesses recorded by employers through its annual Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses (SOII), but it does not verify the accuracy of the data. Although BLS is not required to verify the accuracy of the SOII data, it has recognized several limitations in the data, such as its limited scope, and has taken or is planning several actions to improve the quality and completeness of the SOII.

According to stakeholders interviewed and the occupational health practitioners GAO surveyed, many factors affect the accuracy of employers' injury and illness data, including disincentives that may discourage workers from reporting work-related injuries and illnesses to their employers and disincentives that may discourage employers from recording them. For example, workers may not report a work-related injury or illness because they fear job loss or other disciplinary action, or fear jeopardizing rewards based on having low injury and illness rates. In addition, employers may not record injuries or illnesses because they are afraid of increasing their workers' compensation costs or jeopardizing their chances of winning contract bids for new work. Disincentives for reporting and recording injuries and illnesses can result in pressure on occupational health practitioners from employers or workers to provide insufficient medical treatment that avoids the need to record the injury or illness. From its survey of U.S. health practitioners, GAO found that over a third of them had been subjected to such pressure. In addition, stakeholders and the survey results indicated that other factors may affect the accuracy of employers' injury and illness data, including a lack of understanding of OSHA's recordkeeping requirements by individuals responsible for recording injuries and illnesses.