

## Small Establishments in Construction: Employment, Injuries, and Training

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### OVERVIEW

Over [90% of construction payroll establishments](#) have fewer than 20 employees; together these firms employ 2.7 million workers. In addition to these *small establishments*, [nonemployer establishments](#) (those with no paid employees), accounted for 78.1% of all construction establishments in 2021. Construction workers at establishments with fewer than 20 employees are disproportionately more likely to get injured, [accounting for almost 57% of fatal injuries](#). This Data Bulletin examines trends among small establishments, including numbers of payroll and nonemployer (e.g. independent contractors) establishments, fatal and nonfatal injuries, and training trends. Payroll and nonemployer trends come from the U.S. Census Bureau County Business Patterns and Nonemployer Statistics data. Injury data come from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) and Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses (SOII). Nonfatal data should be interpreted as a baseline: cases are likely higher due to known [underreporting among small establishments](#). Information on training was collected in the 2025 Safety Management in the Construction Industry Survey; CPWR has collaborated with Dodge Construction Network on these surveys since 2012.



### THIS ISSUE

This issue examines trends among small construction establishments (fewer than 20 employees), including number of establishments, employment, injuries, and training.

### KEY FINDINGS

**From 2014 to 2023, 91.0% of payroll establishments in construction had fewer than 20 employees, accounting for 36.5% of payroll employees.**

Chart 1

**Small establishments with fewer than 20 employees accounted for about a quarter (28.3%) of the total annual payroll in 2023.**

Chart 5

**From 2014 to 2023, there was a 20.8% increase in the number of nonemployer establishments in construction (2.4M to 2.9M).**

Chart 6

**Establishments with 10 or fewer employees accounted for 42.4% of fatalities in 2022, while those with 11 to 19 employees accounted for 8.1%.**

Chart 9

**The nonfatal injury rate for establishments with 1 to 10 employees was twice that among establishments with 1,000 or more employees (0.8 versus 0.4 per 100 full-time workers).**

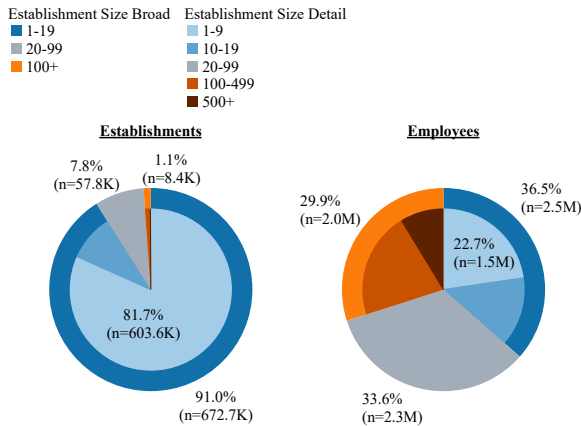
Chart 10

### NEXT DATA BULLETIN

Injury Trends by Subsector

Payroll establishments and employees were first examined by size (Chart 1). From 2014 to 2023, 91.0% of construction payroll establishments employed fewer than 20 people, for an annual average of 2.5 million (M) workers. By detailed *establishment size*, 81.7% employed 1 to 9 employees, accounting for 1.5M workers.

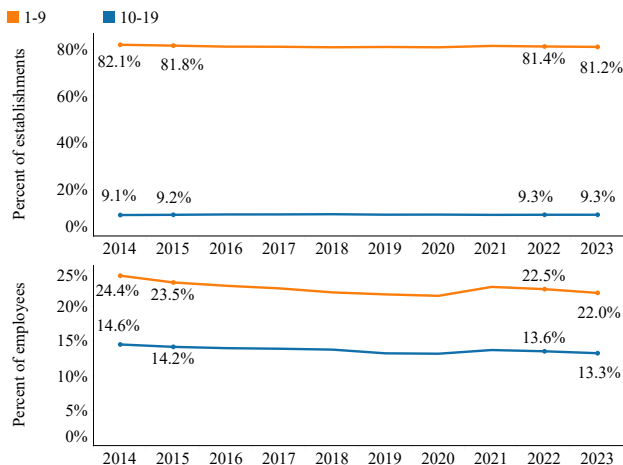
**1. Payroll establishments and employees, by size (2014-2023)\***



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2023 County Business Patterns State File. \*May not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The percentage of small establishments (fewer than 20 employees) in construction has stayed relatively consistent from 2014 to 2023 (Chart 2). There was a 1.1% (*percent change*) decrease in the share of establishments employing 1 to 9 workers (82.1% to 81.2%), while those employing 10 to 19 increased 2.2% (9.1% to 9.3%). By size of firm, employees working for establishments employing 1 to 9 employees decreased 9.8% (24.4% to 22.0%), while there was a 8.9% decrease at firms employing 10 to 19 (14.6% to 13.3%).

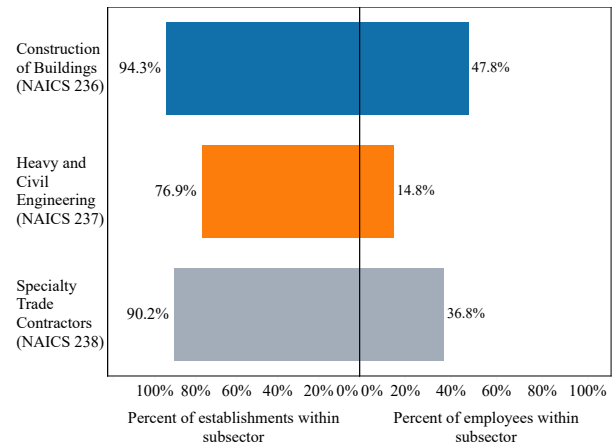
**2. Small payroll establishments and employees, by detailed establishment size and year (2014-2023)**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2023 County Business Patterns State File.

The percentage of small establishments in 2023 varied by *major subsector* (Chart 3). Over 90% of establishments in both Construction of Buildings (NAICS 236; 94.3%) and Specialty Trade Contractors (NAICS 238; 90.2%), had fewer than 20 employees, while 76.9% of Heavy and Civil Engineering (NAICS 237) firms employed fewer than 20 employees. These findings are [comparable to 2016 for each major subsector](#). Almost half of Construction of Buildings (47.8%) employees worked for a small establishment, compared to a third (36.8%) of Specialty Trade Contractors employees and 14.8% of Heavy and Civil Engineering employees.

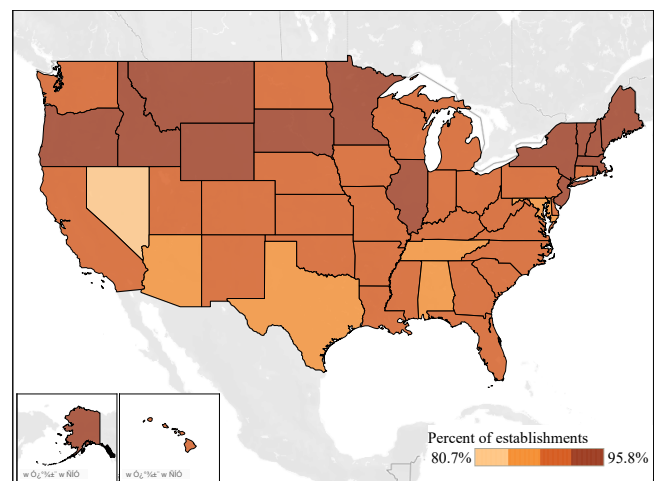
**3. Small payroll establishments and employees, by percent share in major subsector (2023)**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 County Business Patterns State File.

In 2023, Montana (95.8%), Vermont (95.4%), and Maine (94.8%) had the highest percentage of small establishments in construction. In comparison, the District of Columbia (80.7%), Nevada (82.6%), Arizona (87.3%), and Tennessee (87.3%) had the lowest percentages of small establishments.

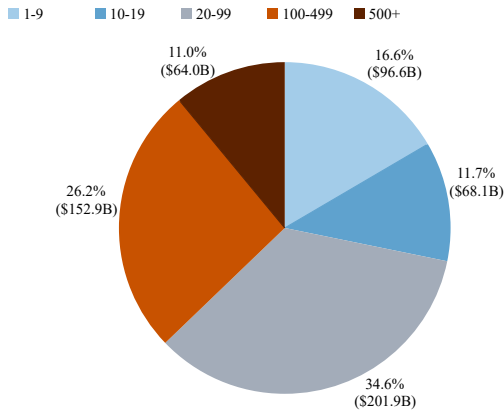
**4. Small establishments, by state (2023)**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 County Business Patterns State File.

Construction payroll trends were then analyzed, finding that small establishments accounted for over a quarter of the industry’s payroll (Chart 5). In 2023, establishments with 1 to 9 employees accounted for 16.6% of the total payroll (\$96.6B), while those with 10 to 19 employees accounted for 11.7% (\$68.1B).

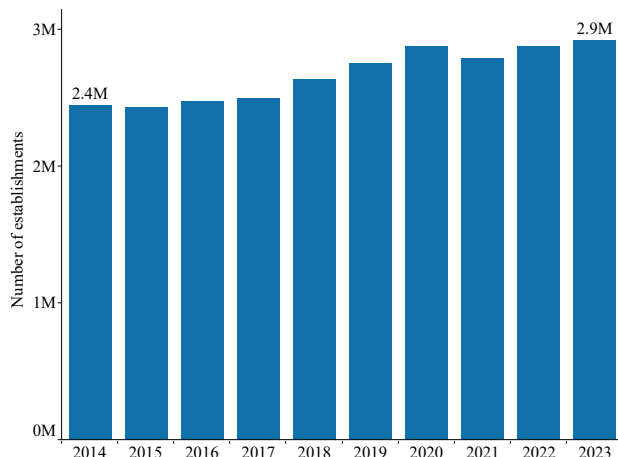
**5. Annual payroll, by detailed establishment size (2023)\***



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 County Business Patterns State File.  
\*May not sum to 100% due to rounding.

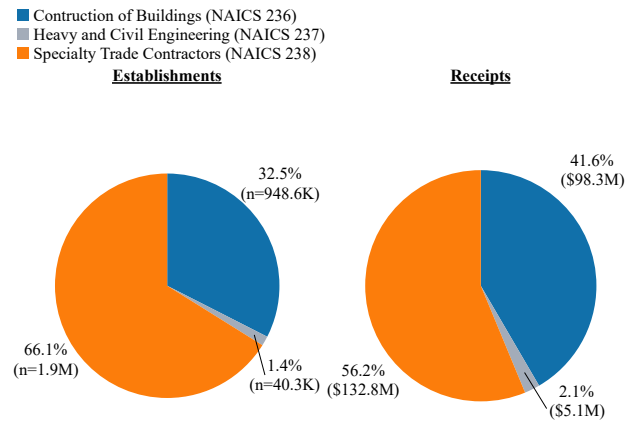
Nonemployer establishments were also examined (Charts 6 and 7). From 2014 to 2023, nonemployer establishments increased 20.8% (2.4M to 2.9M). There was a spike in nonemployer establishments in 2020, which may have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic or by data collection challenges during that time. By major subsector, a majority of nonemployer establishments were Specialty Trade Contractors (66.1%), followed by Construction of Buildings (32.5%) and Heavy and Civil Engineering (1.4%). Specialty Trade Contractors accounted for 56.2% of receipts (e.g., gross revenue), followed by Construction of Buildings (41.6%) and Heavy and Civil Engineering (2.1%).

**6. Number of nonemployer establishments in construction, by year (2014-2023)**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2023 Nonemployer Statistics.

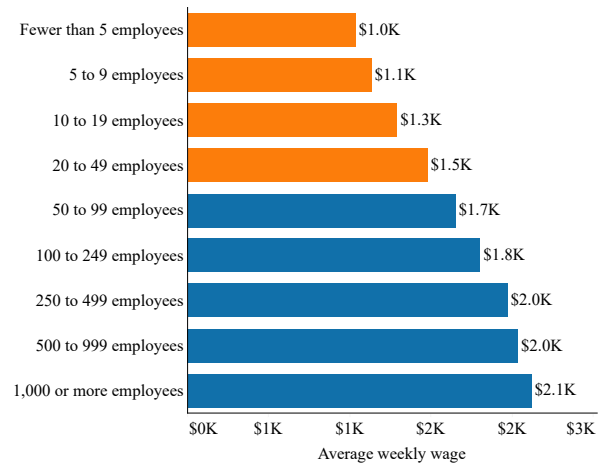
**7. Nonemployer establishments and receipts in construction, by major subsector (2023)\***



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 Nonemployer Statistics.  
\*May not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Next, the average weekly wage by establishment size was explored (Chart 8). The average weekly wage typically increased as establishment size increased. Those working for establishments with fewer than 5 employees had an average weekly wage of \$1.0 thousand (K) while those working with 1,000 or more employees had an average weekly wage two times higher (\$2.1K).

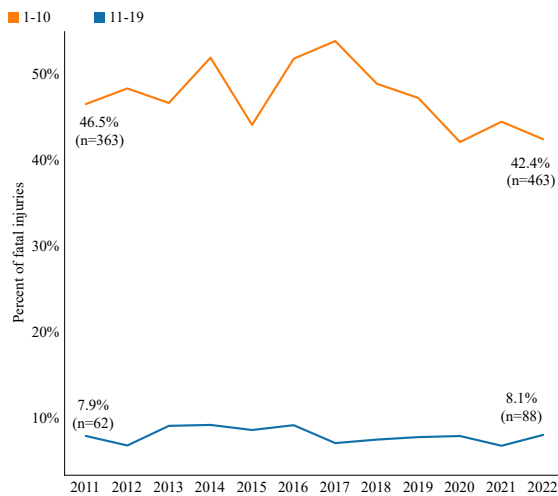
**8. Average weekly wage, by establishment size (2024; Private industry)**



Source: BLS, 2024 Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages.  
\*Orange bars indicate average weekly wage lower than all construction (\$1.5K), while blue bars indicate average weekly wage higher than all construction.

Worker fatalities varied widely according to the size of their employer. Overall, 42.4% of construction worker fatalities occurred among those working for establishments with 1 to 10 employees (Chart 9). From 2011 to 2022, there was a 27.5% increase in the number of fatal injuries at establishments with 1 to 10 employees (363 to 463). In comparison, during this period, [fatal injuries for all construction](#) increased 39.8%.

**9. Fatal at work injuries, by establishment size (2011-2022)\***

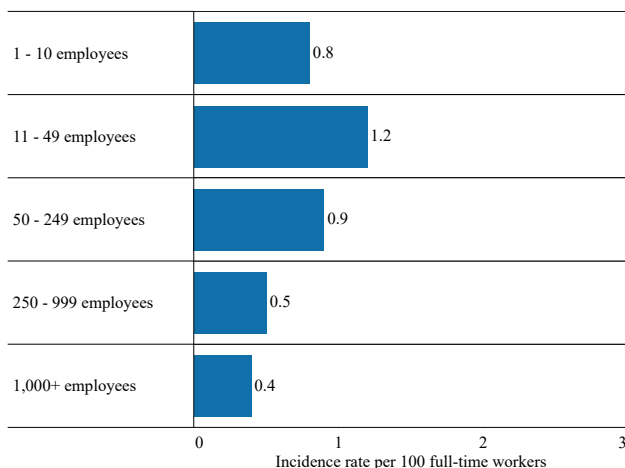


Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011-2022 Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries.

\*2022 is the latest year available.

Nonfatal injuries resulting in *days away from work* were then examined (Chart 10). In 2024, the rate for establishments with 11 to 49 employees was three times higher than that of establishments with 1,000 or more employees (1.2 versus 0.4 per 100 full-time workers). Meanwhile, the rate for establishments with 1 to 10 employees and 50 to 249 employees was twice that of those with 1,000 or more employees (0.8/0.9 versus 0.4). This aligns with prior findings [showing higher nonfatal injury rates among smaller](#) establishments.

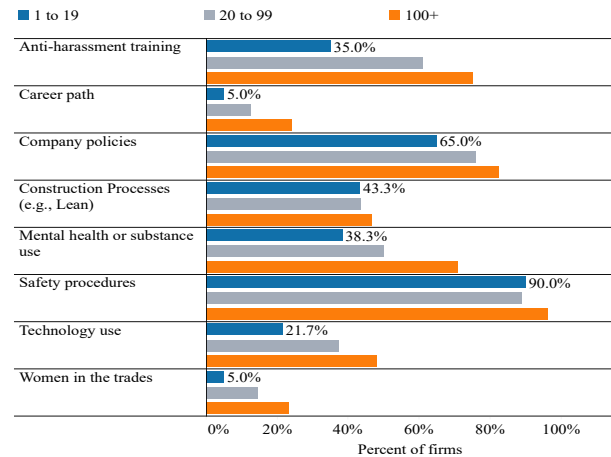
**10. Days away from work cases of nonfatal injuries and illnesses, by establishment size (2024; Private Industry)**



Source: BLS, 2024 Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses.

The 2025 Safety Management in the Construction Industry Survey conducted by CPWR and the Dodge Construction Network asked about training topics construction firms offered. Establishments with fewer than 20 employees were the least likely to offer training for nearly all topics examined (Chart 11). A majority of small establishments reported offering training on safety procedures (90.0%) and company policies (65.0%). These findings further suggest that small establishments have [fewer training programs](#), which may result in increased injury risk.

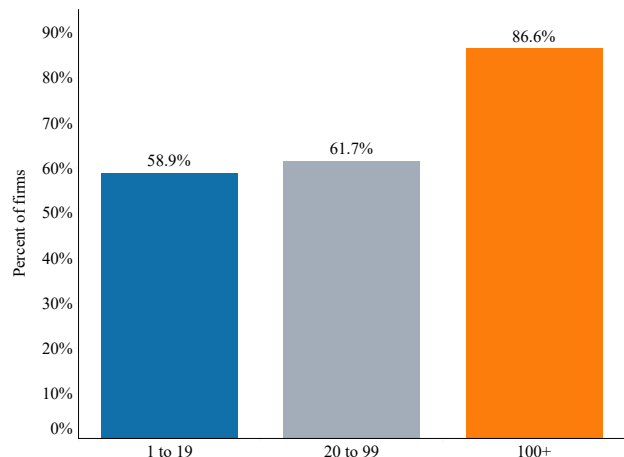
**11. Training topics offered, by establishment size (2025)**



Source: 2025 Safety Management in the Construction Industry Survey.

Small establishments were the least likely to offer training to those providing or leading training (Chart 12). Establishments with 100 or more employees were 1.5 times more likely to train those who were providing or leading training compared to those with 1 to 19 employees (86.6% versus 58.9%).

**12. Firms offering training to those providing or leading trainings, by establishment size (2025)**



Source: 2025 Safety Management in the Construction Industry Survey.

In 2023, 2.4M construction workers were employed at establishments with fewer than 20 employees, while another 2.9 million worked for nonemployer establishments. Half of construction worker fatalities occurred at establishments with fewer than 20 employees, with 42.4% of all fatalities occurring among the smallest establishments, those with 1 to 10 employees. In comparison, a quarter (22.7%) of construction workers work for establishments with 1 to 9 employees.

As small establishments continue to compose a majority of construction payroll establishments, and the number of nonemployer establishments continue to grow, it is important to monitor employment and injury trends because these workers face disproportionately higher injury rates due to a [lack of resources, lack of training programs and proper/safe equipment](#). In addition, nonemployer establishments are not typically [covered under OSHA protections](#).

CPWR has resources and research on [Small Business in the Construction Industry](#), as well as resources on [planning tools and resources](#) that small employers can use for pre-construction planning and before each job task. OSHA's [Small Business Assistance office](#) provides outreach and compliance guidance to help small establishments across all industries. [CPWR](#), [OSHA](#), and [NIOSH](#) provide hazard-specific resources for the industry.

## ACCESS THE CHARTS & MORE

View the [charts](#) in PowerPoint and the [data](#) underlying the charts in Excel. Downloading will start when you click on each link. These files can also be found under the Data Bulletin at: <https://www.cpwr.com/research/data-center/data-reports/>.

## DEFINITIONS

- **Days away from work (DAFW)** – Nonfatal injury cases resulting in at least one day away from work beyond the day of injury or illness onset.
- **Establishment (in construction)** – A single physical location occupied by a relatively permanent main or branch office in the construction industry (NAICS 23). When multiple activities occur in one place under one ownership, a single establishment is classified by its major activity. The individual construction site and projects of such dispersed activities are not considered to be establishments.
  - **Nonemployer establishment** – Establishments with no paid employees, has annual business receipt of \$1 or more in construction (other industries \$1,000 or more), and are subject to federal income taxes. Independent contractors are an example of nonemployer/nonpayroll establishments.
  - **Payroll establishment** – Establishments that have paid employees. See payroll for additional information.

- **Establishment size** – The number of employees working for an establishment. Small establishments are defined differently across data sources:
  - **CBP/QCEW** – Predefined categories for small establishments are 1-9 and 10-19.
  - **CFOI/SOII** – Predefined categories for small establishments are 1-10 and 11-19.
- **Major subsector** – 3-digit NAICS codes within construction (NAICS 23).
- **Payroll** – Payroll includes all forms of compensation, including salaries, wages, commissions, dismissal pay, etc.
- **Percent Change** – Measures the relative change in the value over two time periods, calculated as  $(\text{Second Value} - \text{First Value}) / \text{First Value} \times 100$ .
- **Receipts** – Receipts include gross receipts, sales, commissions, and income as reported on annual tax returns. Nonemployer receipts may include commissions or earnings, while those for employer establishments include only the values of the goods involved in the transaction. More information can be found at: [www.census.gov/programs-surveys/nonemployer-statistics/about/glossary.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/nonemployer-statistics/about/glossary.html).
- **Small establishments** – Establishments with fewer than 20 employees.
  - **Note:** National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) considers small businesses as those with [fewer than 50 employees](#). We use 20 employees due to the unique characteristics of the construction industry.

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## ABOUT THE CPWR DATA CENTER

The CPWR Data Center is part of CPWR–The Center for Construction Research and Training. CPWR is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and training institution created by NABTU, and serves as its research arm. CPWR has focused on construction safety and health research since 1990. The Data Bulletin, a series of publications analyzing construction-related data, is part of our ongoing surveillance project funded by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

Besides cpwr.com, visit CPWR’s other online resources to help reduce construction safety and health hazards:

- Construction Solutions  
<https://www.cpwrconstructionsolutions.org/>
- COVID-19 Construction Clearinghouse  
<https://covid.elcosh.org/index.php>
- Electronic Library of Construction Occupational Safety and Health  
<https://www.elcosh.org/index.php>
- eLCOSH Nano  
<https://nano.elcosh.org/>
- Exposure Control Database  
<https://ecd.cpwrconstructionsolutions.org/>
- Nano Safety Data Sheet Improvement Tool  
<https://nanosds.elcosh.org/>
- Safety Climate–Safety Management Information System (SC-SMIS)  
[www.scsmis.com](http://www.scsmis.com)
- Stop Construction Falls  
<https://stopconstructionfalls.com/>
- Work Safely with Silica  
<https://www.silica-safe.org/>

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