

## What Medical Screenings Indicate about Changes in Construction Worker Health

### **How much have adverse occupational health outcomes among construction workers improved over time? Evidence from 25 years of medical screening**

*Knut Ringen, John Dement, Laura Welch, Patricia Quinn. American Journal of Industrial Medicine, November 2022.*

#### **Overview**

Construction workers have always had a disproportionately high risk of occupational illness. Using data from medical screenings of former construction workers at U.S. Department of Energy nuclear facilities, researchers examined how health outcomes have changed over the past 60 years. They focused on assessing the change in risk for respiratory diseases, for lung cancer mortality, and for hearing impairment, factoring in the time period the worker began in the construction trades. Over 15,000 workers were included in each outcome studied, and researchers analyzed relative risk by decade adjusted for age, sex, smoking, and years of construction trade work.

#### **Key Findings**

- This study found that stronger occupational health protections have had a significant impact on construction workers, as shown by reduction in the risk for occupational disease over the time period studied.
- The greatest reductions in occupational disease are for outcomes when there were strong regulatory and legal incentives to reduce exposures, such as those illnesses associated with asbestos, silica, and vapors, gases, dusts, and fumes (VGDF).
- The smallest improvement—declining only 20 percent—was for hearing impairment, for which little regulatory enforcement has been adopted.
- Risks started to decline in the 1960s, with greatest reductions among workers first employed after 1970.
- The improvements in health have been substantial but there remains ample room for further progress.

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#### **Read the abstract:**

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