



## Early months of employment critical in terms of safety

### The Role of Employee Tenure in Construction Injuries: The Tennessee Case

*Edward L. Taylor, John Moore, Thomas Cressler, John Wagner, and Terry Higgins. CPWR Report, April 2019.*

#### Overview

The inflated risk of injury for new employees in construction and other industries is well documented; however, less is known about the character and timing of those injuries. To fill this knowledge gap, this study analyzed 9,000 workers' compensation claims from the state of Tennessee having dates of injury in 2014 and 2015 to compare the characteristics of early tenure (i.e., less than or equal to 1 year with an employer) construction injuries with all construction injuries. The analyses examined the proportion of these early tenure injuries in various dimensions including age, employer size, the severity, type and cause of injury, and the body part injured.

#### Key Findings

- During 2014 and 2015, 44.5 percent of reported injuries in Tennessee were sustained by workers with one year or less of experience in the construction industry. These results were comparable for similar populations in Ohio (46 percent) and Washington (48 percent), suggesting the Tennessee result was not unique.
- Firm size played a significant role in the incidence of injury. During 2015, the smallest firms (0-4 employees) reported injury to nearly half (49 percent) of employees compared to less than 10 percent (8.9 percent) reported by firms with 100-249 workers.
- About two-thirds of all first-year injuries were sustained in the first six months of employment. The high percentage of workers injured who had a year or less of tenure indicates that regardless of firm size the early months of employment are critical in terms of safety.
- For those having tenure of one year or less, the proportion of serious injuries (i.e. those requiring emergency evaluation, hospitalization, and future major medical treatment) only slightly exceeded the proportion of serious injuries among all workers.
- There is a statistical difference in the distribution of injuries in terms of type, cause, or body part when considering injuries related to the length of tenure.
- In terms of cause, the top three items: object being lifted, strain, and lifting were responsible for over 43 percent of the top ten causes. The top ten represent over half (52.1 percent) of injuries among the 72 causes listed. Injuries to the lower back, fingers, and shoulder are the three body parts most impacted amounting to 41.8 percent of the top ten.
- New employee safety orientation/training is important, and since longer tenured workers had the similar injury causes and types as shorter tenured workers, safety training for new workers could also be used as refresher training for experienced workers.

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