Work-Related Fatalities in a Frontier State

Montana has one of the highest rates of work-related fatalities in the country. Every worker death is one too many, and 38 workers lost their lives while on the job in Montana in 2016. What areas can we target to improve worker health by preventing worker deaths in Montana?

The Challenge

In early 2018, following a local newspaper article published on Montana's high work-related fatality rates compared to the rest of the country, several stakeholders contacted the Montana Occupational Health & Safety Surveillance (MOHSS) program at the Montana Department of Labor & Industry with questions about recent worker deaths. The challenge was to use the available data on work-related fatalities in Montana to effectively communicate any lessons learned to diverse stakeholder groups across the state.

The Response

To reveal areas of prevention and action steps to start to address worker deaths in Montana, the MOHSS program used available data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries and state death certificates. The majority of the information presented in the report was publicly available, but the key was to package the results in a way that was clear and concise for all audiences. The final report, "Work-Related Fatalities in Montana," was shared widely with stakeholders across the state, including presentations to legislators, employers, workers, and safety and health professionals. The report provided key information on preventing worker deaths in agriculture, construction, and transportation industries. Action steps focused on seat belt use, all-terrain vehicle (ATV) safety, scheduling and driving for road conditions, and distracted driving policies.

The Impact

The information shared on worker deaths in Montana in the MOHSS report proved to be eye-opening for all parties, including individual employers and workers. Many results of the report were new to our Montana stakeholders. One outcome of the report was a revamping of the OSHA Area Office's construction outreach and education campaign, based on report information on work-related fatalities and recent increases in worker deaths in Montana's construction industry.

> "Montana is a unique place to work and live. Employers and workers are faced with challenges every day. We hope this report provides practical information and action steps to help make Montana a safer place to work. A worker death is never 'just part of the job.' "
>
> -Julia Brennan, Montana Department of Labor & Industry

For more information about occupational health issues in Montana, please visit our website:
http://www.mtworkerhealth.com