

Improving Our Understanding of Workplace Injury Sources

The first step in reducing the prevalence and severity of workplace injuries is observing the hazardous circumstances or behaviors which lead to injury. Combining standardized codes with narratives, workplace health and safety professionals in Montana hope to identify all possible sources of injury and work to mitigate them.



The Challenge

While Montana has seen a substantial decline in reported workplace injuries in the past 20 years, the state's rate of injury still exceeds the national average. Continuing the downward trend and achieving the safety outcomes accomplished in other states requires the Montana Occupational Health and Safety Surveillance Program (MOHSS) to understand precisely what hazards are harming Montana workers.

The Response

Starting in 2023, MOHSS and researchers with the Montana Department of Labor & Industry (DLI) began combining standardized injury codes used in the Montana workers' compensation system with narratives provided in accompanying accident reports. This mimics a practice of the workers' compensation insurance industry, but instead of being used to detect errors or fraud, this approach allows MOHSS to focus more closely on the numerous potential hazards preceding specific types of accidents. With this information, MOHSS can assist safety training efforts provided by DLI and other stakeholders in Montana, since the hazards are identified and can be addressed in trainings and on-site services, helping to reduce the prevalence or severity of workplace accidents and subsequent workplace injuries.

The Impact

While still in the early stages of implementation, this approach to identifying hazards has allowed MOHSS and DLI to produce multiple publications focusing on specific known hazards along with novel hazardous conditions, prompting discussion into hazard mitigation. Specifically, research has examined factors preceding fall injuries along with situations where workplace violence is more common. In time, MOHSS and DLI hope to expand their focus to include additional sources and advance safety professionals' ability to address specific hazard mitigation further, making Montana the safest place it can be for workers.

For more information about occupational health in Montana, visit the Montana Department of Labor & Industry Website: <https://erd.dli.mt.gov/>