

Increasing the Identification of Work-Related Deaths in Louisiana

In 2024, Louisiana and Tennessee tied for the eighth-highest work-related death rate in the U.S. (5.1 per 100,000 FTE). Louisiana consistently ranks among the top ten states, and persistent underreporting suggests the true burden is likely higher.

The Challenge

Accurate identification of work-related deaths is essential for effective occupational health surveillance. Surveillance informs hazard identification, trend analysis, prevention and outreach strategies, policy development, and resource allocation.

The Louisiana Occupational Health and Injury Surveillance Program maintains a database of work-related deaths using death certificates marked “Y” for the Injury at Work item (“Work Item”). During routine database updates, some deaths that appear work-related are found with the Work Item marked “N” or left blank. When supporting evidence exists—such as media reports or OSHA fatality investigation summaries—requests can be made to the certifying coroner to amend the death certificate. However, this process is administratively burdensome: coroners must submit a wet-signed letter via mail to the Louisiana Department of Health’s Vital Records and Statistics Center (Vital Records) to authorize any changes. Historically, this resulted in a low success rate for corrections.

The Response

In 2023, a revised process was implemented. Previously, Vital Records staff managed all communication with coroners. Under the new approach, the Occupational Health Program prepares a concise case summary letter that includes a description of the incident, the specific requested change(s), principal investigator contact information, and supporting documentation. Letters are signed by the State Epidemiologist and mailed to the coroner’s office by Vital Records. Follow-up occurs approximately two weeks later and includes a review of the electronic death records database for updates, confirming receipt of correspondence with Vital Records, and direct outreach to the coroner’s office, if needed.

The Impact

The revised process substantially improved outcomes. The success rate for correcting death certificates increased from 21% (5/23 cases) under the previous process to 83% (15/18 cases) after implementation.

While this approach improves correction rates, it does not directly address inaccuracies in initial completion of the Work Item. Guidance documents were developed to improve surveillance of [heat-related](#) and [disaster-related](#) deaths and were presented at Louisiana Coroner Association meetings in 2025. While the Work Item was not the main focus, accurate completion was emphasized. To further improve case capture, we plan to develop standalone guidance for identifying and certifying work-related deaths to disseminate to coroners and medical examiners.

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For more information, visit <https://www.ldh.la.gov/page/occupational-health-surveillance> or contact oph.seetweb@la.gov.