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# Workers Memorial Day

April 28, 2015

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Report: Workplace deaths in Florida with a focus on Southeast Florida

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## What is Workers Memorial Day?

Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act forty-three years ago to ensure that every worker would have the right to a safe workplace. The OSH Act established the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which formally came into being on April 28, 1971 with the mission to assure safe and healthful working conditions for workers by setting and enforcing standards and by providing training, outreach, education, and assistance to both employers and employees. Despite these efforts, there continue to be thousands of workplace deaths each year and on April 28 we join together in solidarity and remembrance of those individuals who were killed due to often preventable workplace tragedies. As a community of employers, employees, and individuals, there are efforts that we can make to aid in the prevention of work related deaths.

***Every two hours, an American worker is permanently silenced. Speak out for safe jobs.***

***- US Dept. of Labor***

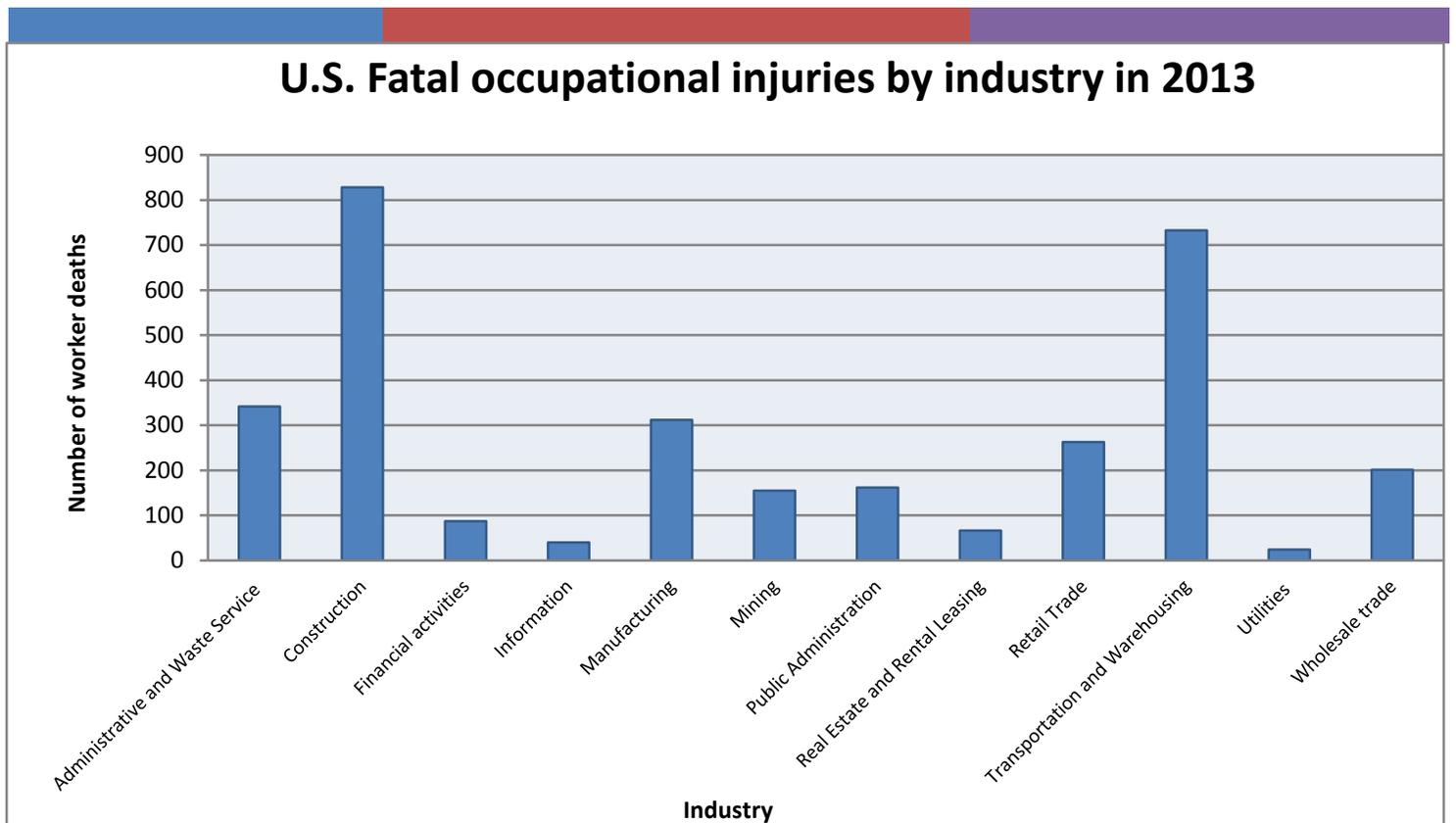
The Occupational Safety and Health Administration was created in 1971 by President Richard N. Nixon with the mission to “assure safe and healthful working conditions for working men and women by setting and enforcing standards and by providing training, outreach, education and assistance.” OSHA provides employers and workers with a set of rules and regulations that, if followed, would lead to safer and healthier workplaces. As a result of OSHA, employers are required by law to provide workplaces that are free of known dangers that could harm their employees.

Despite these efforts, there continue to be thousands of work related deaths in the United States. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports 4585 workplace fatalities in 2013.<sup>1</sup> Among all occupations

There were 828 work-related Construction fatalities nationwide with 733 in Transportation and Warehousing and 342 in Administrative and Waste Services. All three of the most frequently cited safety violations by OSHA in 2013 and 2014 – fall protection, scaffolding, and ladders -- are construction standards for which there are OSHA guidelines available.<sup>2</sup>

**Construction ranks as the job with the highest worker fatalities in the U.S.**

Construction, Transportation and Warehousing, and Administrative and Waste Services rank as the jobs with the highest worker death tolls.

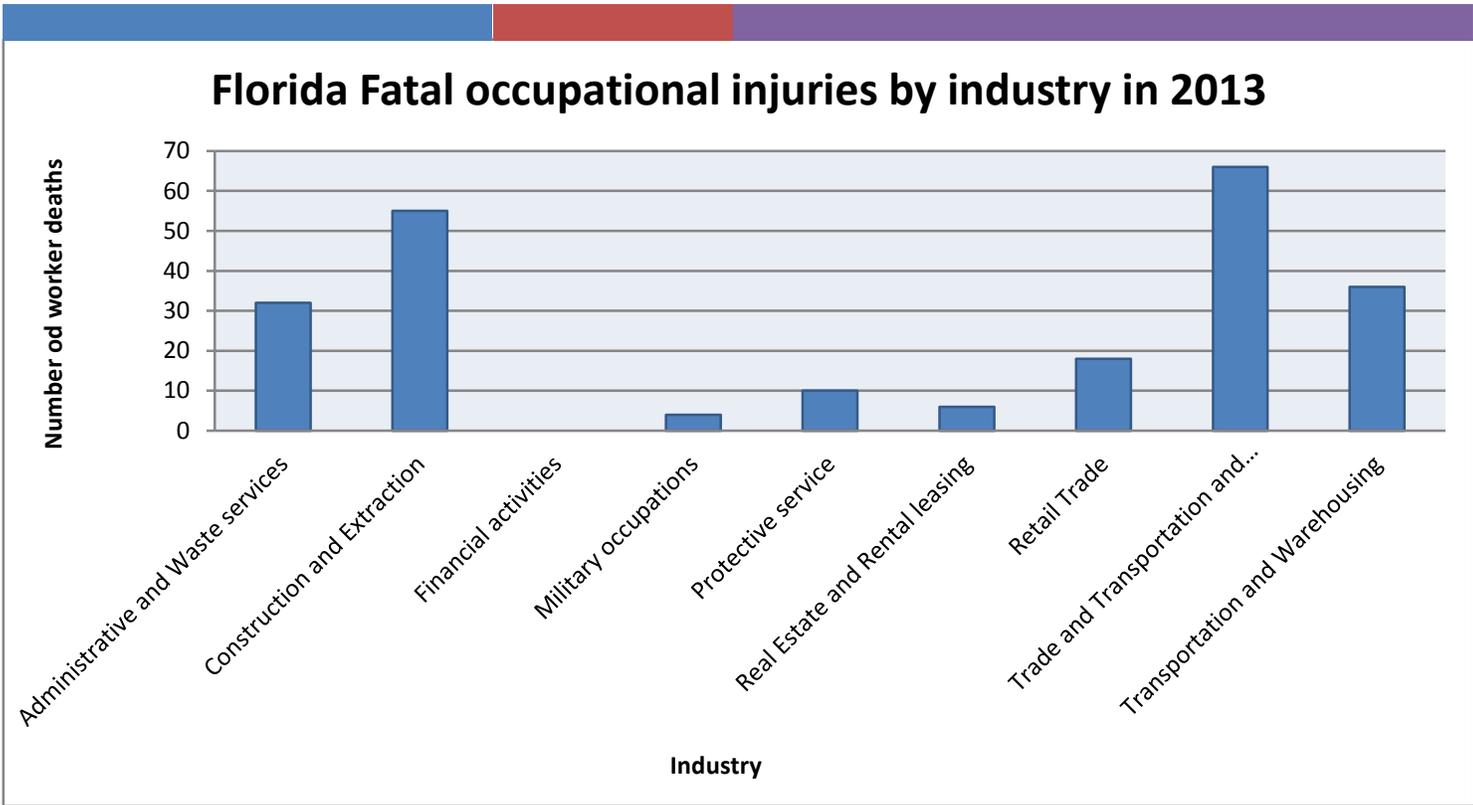


Graph is based on data acquired from the Bureau of Labor Statistics report on Fatal occupational injuries in the U.S. for the 2013 year. For more information, please visit <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/cfoi/cftb0277.pdf>

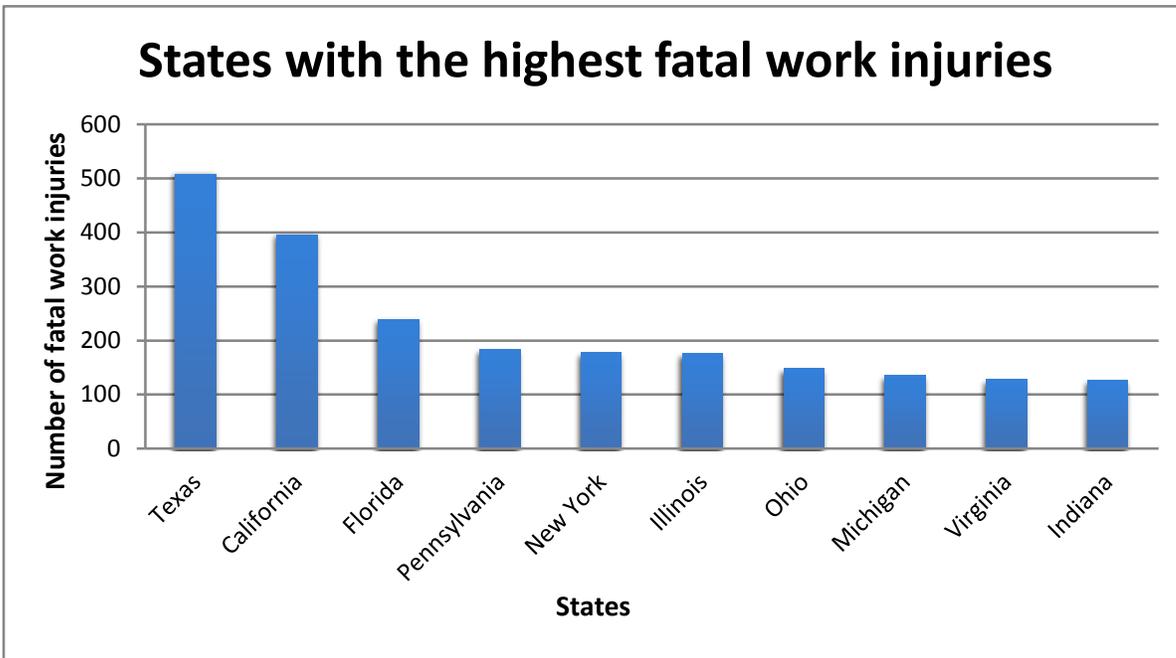
1 Revisions to the 2013 Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) counts, April 2015. [http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/cfoi/cfoi\\_revised13.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/cfoi/cfoi_revised13.pdf)

2 Top Ten Most Frequently Cited Standards. [https://www.osha.gov/Top\\_Ten\\_Standards.html](https://www.osha.gov/Top_Ten_Standards.html); OSHA Releases 2013 Top 10 Most Cited Standards <http://www.oshalawupdate.com/2013/11/04/osha-releases-2013-top-10-most-cited-standards/>

Work related fatalities in Florida mirror the national statistics. Construction places second in worker related deaths with a total of 55 deaths in 2013 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Florida regularly places in the top three states for workplace fatalities each year.



Graph is based on data acquired from the Bureau of Labor Statistics report on Fatal occupational injuries in Florida for 2013. For more information, please visit <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/cfoi/tgs/2013/iifw12.htm>.



**239  
deaths in  
Florida in  
2013**

Graph is based on data acquired from the Bureau of Labor Statistics at <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/cfoi/cfch0012.pdf>

Despite the very high number of workplace fatalities, particularly in certain industries, the numbers reported by OSHA and the Bureau of Labor Statistics are likely to be lower than the actual number of workplace fatalities as the statistics only reflect reported fatalities and do not address longer term fatalities such as the effect of pesticide exposure or of potential exposure to other hazardous chemicals or materials in the workplace.

Additionally, due to confidentiality factors, it is often very difficult to attain specific details as to the nature of the workplace fatalities although we can tell from the data that many of the deaths are in industries for which OSHA standards and guidance do exist. In some cases, such as that of Clarence Grant, safety belts were being used but other safety procedures in order to ensure that the bulldozer did not fall into the water were not.

## Remembering a husband, father, and a friend

Clarence Grant was killed on August 16, 2014. He was 74 years old, born February 2 1940. Clarence was a heavy equipment operator working on an Everglades restoration project when his bulldozer went into a body of water. Clarence was unable to free himself from his safety belts and the cab of the equipment. He subsequently drowned, leaving behind a wife, seven children, and eighteen grandchildren.

### Names of some of the workers killed on-the job in 2014 in Southeast Florida

Henry Galvez, 34  
Carlos Rodriguez, 61  
Manuel Fernandez, 59  
Marcelo Zuniga, 25  
Richard Mike, 67  
Fernando Cuellar, 55  
Reinaldo Rodriguez, 49  
William Slaughaupt, 67  
Robert Elliot, 55  
Christopher Ricci, 27  
Hernan Gutierrez, 42  
Jose Felix Obando, 42  
Jose Alfredo, 29  
Isagirrez-Mejia, 29  
Snejdjer Rodriguez, 29  
Ronaldy Najerez, 29



Names of workers come from data compiled by advocates. These names do not reflect all of the workers that were killed on the job in Southeast Florida during 2014 as much of this information is confidential.

## A few stories behind the numbers

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Reinaldo Rodriguez was a 45 year old man who died in a crush accident at Milan Kitchens in Hialeah. A pile of timber became unstable and fell on him at the kitchen cabinet manufacturing company.

Robert Elliot was a 45 year old man who was apparently struck by lightning while working on the roof of a Pompano Beach auto shop.

An unknown employee was involved in an accident that occurred on June 5, 2014 while he was working from a basket on an aerial lift. He made contact with an overhead power line carrying 7,620 volts of electricity causing severe burn and shock injuries

Another unknown electrical contractor was installing a power factor correction at an auto dealership and made contact with part of the electrical system, which resulted in an arc flash, killing him.

Hernan Gutierrez, 42, fell into and was taken through an industrial wood chipper. Authorities were able to locate his hand in order to identify him.

**From May 30 thru September 30, 2014 there were 30 workplace deaths in the OSHA South Florida area.**

An unknown male worker cutting an electrical wire without using an electrical disconnect tool called a "shot-gun" (hot stick) was killed when the tension was released. The wire jumped and made contact with the employee's head and neck area, electrocuting him on site.

Henry Galvez was working from a scaffold when he fell approximately 15 feet.

William Slaughenhaupt fell eight feet from a catwalk onto a concrete floor below while escorting a third party in a commercial building undergoing construction.

Clarence Grant was back dragging the grounds adjacent to a water hole. He reversed the bulldozer into the 15ft x 15ft hole of water. The bulldozer was partially submerged in the water with the operator trapped inside. The operator was removed from the cab and transported to Lakeside Medical Center where he was pronounced dead.

Workers on the I-95 expansion project noticed their co-worker, Obando, had fallen into the excavation site that was 20-23 feet deep. Two co-workers jumped in and attempted to rescue Obando but were unable to pull him out, according to authorities.

William "Pee Wee" Thomas was run over by a top loader container stake machine at the Port of Miami on July 2, 2014.

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**According to OSHA, there have been 22 work-related deaths in Florida from October 1, 2014 through early February, 2015, 7 of which were in Southeast Florida.**

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# What can be done

Workplace safety and health is something that should be important to employers, employees, elected officials, and community members. Below are just a few steps that can be taken to ensure safer workplaces.

- Employers should:
  - Establish Comprehensive Injury- Illness Prevention Programs to promote the identification and control of workplace hazards.
  - Withdraw all programs that discourage the reporting of workplace injuries and illnesses or other programs that shift employer responsibility for health and safety and blame workers.
  - Support workers who are concerned about workplace safety.
- Communities and local officials should prioritize workplace safety so that an employee is not put in the position of choosing between having a job and receiving a paycheck.
  - There are resources available to both employers and employees to ensure that workplace safety trainings and worksite evaluations are put in place.
  - We should all become educated on workplace safety and support the efforts of OSHA to assist both employers and employees in establishing safe and healthy workplaces.

Report prepared by South Florida Council on Occupational Safety and Health (South Florida COSH)

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