
Reducing Injuries in the Trucking Industry

Survey Results Assessing the Safety & Health of
Washington State Truck Drivers



Trucking Injury Reduction
The Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention (SHARP) Program
Promoting Safer, Healthier Workplaces

Results from 2006 Survey of WA State Truck Drivers

Recent data shows that the trucking industry in Washington State experiences a high number of injury claims and high costs for workers' compensation. The Safety & Health Assessment & Research for Prevention (SHARP) Program has been gathering and analyzing information about various safety and health issues faced by truck drivers each day while on the job.

In the summer of 2006 we conducted a survey of Washington State truck drivers who had a commercial driver's license (CDL) and were employed in the trucking industry. The survey asked drivers about their daily work, perceptions of risks and hazards, biggest problems with injuries, including causes and possible solutions, experiences with pain and work-related injuries, company safety practices, and overall feelings about the job. We received 397 surveys from across the state.

Survey Results: Numbers may not add up due to missing data on the survey

- 44% were part of a small fleet (less than 25 trucks); 49% from a large fleet (25 or more trucks); 13 (3%) were owner/operators
- Respondents had an average of 17½ years experience as a truck driver
- 72 (18%) belonged to a union; 324 (82%) did not

Participants came from all different trucking industries:

1. General Freight (151 people)
2. Specialized Freight (205 people)
3. Couriers (34 people)
4. Local Messengers & Delivery (7 people)
5. Waste Collection (43 people)

Drivers spend the majority of their work time driving a truck. However, many of them also spend more than 25% of their time handling material/cargo. And these drivers are 2 times more likely to report pain in their lower extremities due

to work. Drivers *need* to consider their health and safety practices while working in and around the truck, but *not* at the exclusion of considering time spent in other tasks.

Table 1. Percent of time spent in work activities

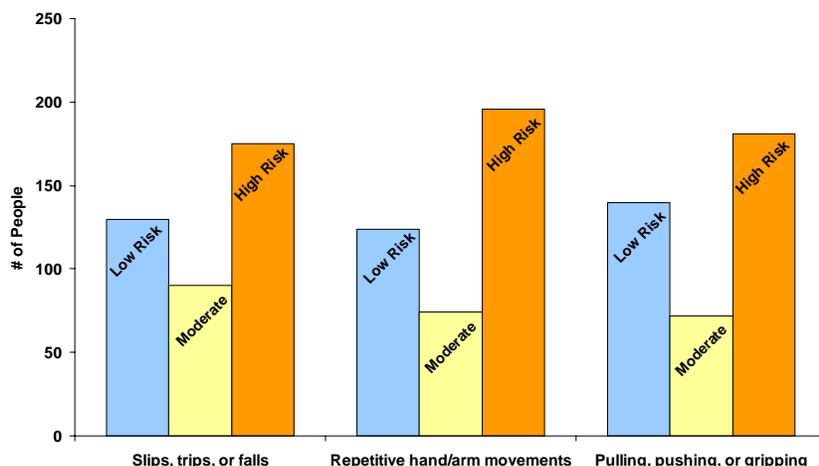
	< 25% of work time	> 25% of work time
Driving	50	342
Sitting/Standing	308	49
Handling Material/Cargo	243	132
Standing/Walking	270	94



The more time spent handling material/cargo, the higher the drivers' risk of injury!

In fact, many workers rated non-driving activities (e.g., slip, trip, fall hazards, repetitive hand/arm movements, pulling/pushing) as some of the most hazardous activities that they are exposed to.

Risk Perceptions for Work Activities



Many drivers are also working long hours:

- 322 (81%) said they work 41-70 hours per week
- 27 drivers said they work more than 70 hours per week

Moreover, those who work more than 40 hours per week are also significantly more likely to feel pressure to work even longer hours. These drivers are more than 2 times more likely to report pain in their neck and upper extremities caused by their work.

About 40% of drivers “regularly feel pressured to work faster and for longer hours.”

Work-Related Injuries

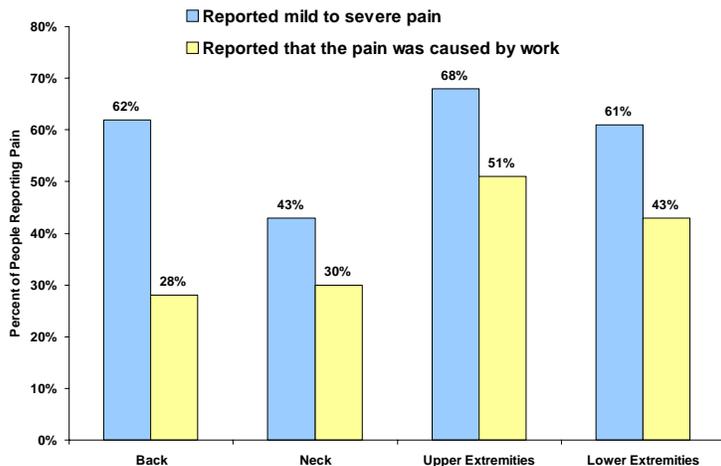
We know there is under-reporting of injuries to employers. Of the 83 drivers who said they had a work-related injury in the past year, 43% did not file a workers’ compensation claim.

Percent of workers who filed a workers’ compensation claim for a work-related injury



Moreover, several people report having pain as a result of their work even though they did not necessarily report having a work-related injury.

Figure 2. Pain levels in drivers' back, neck, upper extremities (shoulders, elbows/forearms) and lower extremities (knees, feet/ankles)



One quarter of the respondents reported there were significant changes in their job in the past year, with only about half of those drivers saying the changes were for the better. Moreover, employees who reported significant changes in their job in the past year were almost 2 times more likely to report back and neck pain as a result of their work.

Drivers who feel **physically exhausted** after work are about 2 times more likely to report back pain than those who do not; those who feel **emotionally exhausted** are almost 2 times more likely to report neck pain as a result of their work than those who are not emotionally exhausted.

Alternatively, drivers who report higher job satisfaction are less likely to experience back and neck pain and are less likely to miss work due to any pain they have experienced.

Having a positive safety climate does matter!

A safety climate is characterized by things like management attention to safety issues, employee participation in safety decisions, availability of proper/well-maintained equipment, overall prioritizing of safety, etc.

Employees in workplaces with a positive safety climate report:

Reduced exposure to...

- Vibration from driving
- Manually carrying heavy loads
- Exposure to slippery surfaces
- Repetitive hand/arm movements
- Activities that require pulling/pushing
- Exposure to falling objects

Feeling...

- Less pain in their back, neck, upper extremities, and lower extremities as a result of their work
- Less pressure to work longer hours
- Less pressure to work faster
- Greater job satisfaction

“Hours of service don’t allow for a nap...if you’re tired, you must try to drive all 11 hours to make any money.”

- Survey respondent



Increasing job satisfaction may protect drivers from the effects of injury!

Biggest Causes of Injuries

Consistent with what employers told us in a 2005 survey, drivers reported that back, shoulder, & arm/hand overexertions and slips, trips, & falls are the biggest causes of injuries.

- **Back, shoulder, arm/hand overexertions** - Lifting objects that are too heavy was noted as the number one cause. Getting help, using a fork lift, using proper equipment, getting equipment upgrades, and equipment maintenance were listed as top solutions.
- **Slips, trips, falls** - Slippery ramps and docks were noted as the number one cause. Being attentive, careful and aware of your surroundings was listed as the top solution.

Recommendations:

Implement and promote an **early reporting system** for symptoms and injuries. Dealing with issues early can save more costly injuries from happening.

Address scheduling and other stresses with workers. For example, create ways for workers to have **more control** over their daily work can help.

Promote a positive **safety climate** by demonstrating management commitment to safety. Involve workers and show that changes can be made quickly, when feasible.

Demonstrate how **management truly cares** about driver safety by

1. Holding regular safety meetings with drivers
2. Making properly and well-maintained equipment available
3. Changing drivers' perceptions about potential risks on the job

Off-the-shelf solutions and methods are available to **reduce the risk** of overexertions, slips, trips, and falls, and motor vehicle crashes (the top concerns of drivers). Contact your industry or labor organization, or SHARP (contact info below) for help addressing these injury risks.

This description of hazards should demonstrate how the environment, job tasks, and the overall organization are inter-related. Fixing just one part of the larger system will likely not solve the problem!



Cost was listed as a leading barrier to addressing the top injury concerns drivers have.

Please contact us if you would like to participate in the TIRES program to reduce injuries and workers' compensation costs in your company.

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