



**FALLS-ON-THE-SAME-LEVEL**  
TECHNICAL REPORT 59-1-2004

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**Purpose:**

This brief report summarizes Washington State Fund workers' compensation claims data for injuries resulting from falls-on-the-same-level.<sup>1</sup> This report is intended to raise awareness and understanding of fall injuries in an effort to encourage increased prevention efforts within industries that experience high rates of falls.

**Overview:**

Between 1997-2001, there were 58,048 injuries resulting from falls-on-the-same-level with estimated State Fund costs of \$391.5 million.

In most of the cases, workers either fell to the work surface (76%) or they fell into or against objects (18%).

**Definition:**

A fall-on-the-same-level is a slip, trip, or a fall in which the worker impacts either the surface or an object at the same level or above the surface on which he/she is standing.

The majority of claims (70%) incurred medical expenses only, i.e., no timeloss. A total of 320 workers had total permanent disability – the average cost per claim was \$234,800. Another 4,815 workers had partial permanent disability – the average cost of each of these claims was \$46,000.

Sprains, contusions, and fractures were common, resulting in 43%, 25%, and 8% of the claims, respectively.

Injuries to the lower extremity (knee, ankle, or foot) occurred in 22% of the cases, while the back was injured 17% of the time, and multiple body parts were affected in another 13%.

**Trends Over Time:**

Yearly trends in cost and frequency of occurrence are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Trends in Workers' Compensation Claims for Falls-on-the-Same-Level**

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	Total
Claim Count	12,543	11,298	10,952	11,812	11,443	58,048
Claim Rate per 10,000 FTE	91.5	79.6	75.2	79.5	78.3	80.7
Total Cost in Millions	\$77.0	\$74.7	\$73.5	\$84.6	\$81.8	\$391.5
Average Claim Cost	\$6,135	\$6,608	\$6,709	\$7,162	\$7,152	\$6,745

### **Sources of Injury:**

More than 50% of the injuries resulted from striking the floor, ground or an unspecified working surface. Other identified working surfaces included streets, steps, sidewalks, roofs, ramps, and platforms. Other sources included ladders (145 injuries) and hand tools (310 injuries).

Oil, water, or other slippery substances were contributing factors in many of the fall injuries. Falls-on-the-same-level involving ladders were often due to defective equipment or improper use, while those involving hand tools were often due to the tool slipping or breaking during use.

### **Risk Classes:**

About 50% of injuries resulting from falls-on-the-same-level occurred in 30 risk classes.<sup>2</sup> The top ten risk classes, ordered by prevention index,<sup>3</sup> are shown in Table 2. Nineteen percent of the claims and 26% of the claim costs occurred in these risk classes. While a relatively large proportion of the claims occurred in restaurants, both the claim rate and average cost per claim were lower than those seen in other risk classes, such as logging.

**Table 2: Risk Classes by Prevention Index for Falls-on-the-Same-Level**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Total Cost (millions)</b>	<b>Claim Rate per 10,000</b>	<b>Average Cost</b>
Logging	648	\$7.5	831	\$11,600
Wood frame building construction	1,210	\$12.6	219	\$10,444
Roofing	461	\$4.0	433	\$8,726
State health care facilities	563	\$5.6	264	\$10,031
Restaurants	9,487	\$33.8	195	\$3,567
Nursing homes	1,584	\$9.6	190	\$4,114
Motels & hotels	889	\$5.5	199	\$6,069
Meat dealers wholesale	521	\$2.7	219	\$4,114
Building construction, NOC	594	\$9.3	209	\$15,657
Trucking, NOC	838	\$10.1	186	\$12,076

1. Ronald Wrona wrote this report with support from the CDC Grant 5U01OH07292-01. Christy Curwick and Jena Jones provided editing assistance. The data for all State Fund claims were extracted on October 8, 2003 from the data warehouse operated by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries with dates of injury between January 1, 1997 and December 31, 2001. Falls on the same level include those claims where the fall was described as having occurred on a walkway, working surface or into or against objects (ANSI Accident Type Codes 050 –059). Employment for rate calculations uses payroll hours submitted to the Department of Labor and Industries. One FTE is 2,000 hours.
2. A basic risk classification is a grouping of businesses having the same or similar exposures to occupational illnesses and injuries. Each classification carries a premium rate reflecting the hazards to which workers in these businesses are exposed. In the State of Washington there are over 300 such classifications as defined in the Washington Administrative Code Chapter 296-17 Sections 501 through 779.
3. The prevention index (which is the average of two rankings – one by claim rate and the second by claim count) provides a way of identifying those risk classes that have high potential payoff for prevention.

This is a production of the Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention Program; Washington State Department of Labor and Industries; PO Box 44330; Olympia, Washington 98504-4330. Tel: 1-888-66-SHARP.