



MARINE SAFETY UPDATE

FISHING INDUSTRY WORKERS RISK

EYE INJURIES

Loss of vision can greatly affect daily living and quality of life. More than 2.4 million injuries to the eye occur in the U.S. every year. Every day, over 1,000 eye injuries take place in the workplace. Annually, over 100,000 eye injuries are disabling, resulting in temporary or permanent vision loss. It is believed, however, that 90% of these injuries could be prevented or the severity of the injury reduced.

There are few population-based studies on eye injuries. In 1980, the U.S. Department of Labor found that "three out of five workers who suffered an eye injury wore no eye protection. And, of those who did, 40% wore the wrong kind."

From 1992 through 1996, the Alaska Department of Labor recorded 1,131 work-related eye injuries that resulted in work days lost. Most injuries were caused by contact with an object or equipment (801), exposure to a harmful substance

(284), being struck by an object (172), and being struck against an object (26). These statistics do not include self-employed workers such as many who work in commercial fishing.

The commercial fishing industry leads all industries in Alaska for eye injuries.

Alaska Trauma Registry (ATR) data was used to compare the rate of eye injuries in commercial fishing to other Alaska industries. ATR includes information from all 24 acute-care hospitals in Alaska. It is maintained by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Community Health and EMS Section.

From 1991 through 1996, the ATR recorded 25,198 injuries of all types. Of these, 2,880 or 11% were work-related. Work-related eye injuries numbered 94 or 3.3% of all work-related injuries. Eye injuries not work-related numbered 349. Males accounted for 99% (93) of work-related eye injuries. By race, 80% of those with work-related eye injuries were white, 7% were Asian/Pacific Islanders, 2% were black and the rest unknown. The mean age of those with eye injuries on the job was 35.5 years.

The mean hospital cost for an eye injury was \$9,957 with a high of \$96,185.

Four of these work-related eye injuries were permanent injuries but with good rehabilitation potential. Three of these four were in the commercial fishing industry. One victim was struck by a fishing hook, another by a troll line and the third was struck by a knife flipped by a halibut that resulted in a lacerated eyeball.

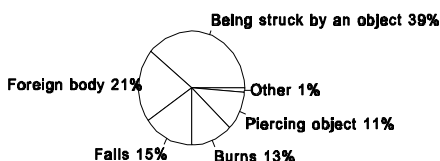
The commercial fishing industry leads all industries in Alaska for eye injuries. Most of the fishing-related eye injuries in Alaska are due to being struck by an object (10). This includes lines (4), crab claws (2) and hooks (2).

Interviews detected what fishers perceived to be the operations with highest risks of eye injuries.

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CAUSES OF EYE INJURY

in the workplace



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