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## Oregon workplace deaths set a record low

(Salem) The number of deaths of workers covered by the Oregon workers' compensation system set a record low in 2005. Thirty-one workers died on the job during 2005, the lowest number reported since the state began tracking the statistic in 1943. That was significantly below the 46 deaths in 2004 and the average of 55 deaths per year in the 1990s. During the 1980s, Oregon averaged 81 deaths per year. The previous record low of 34 was set in 2001.

"While we are pleased that more workers are returning home safely to their families at the end of the work day, there is still much work to do," said Cory Streisinger, director of the Department of Consumer & Business Services. "Employers, workers, and government must stay focused on workplace safety and health so that the number of deaths at work continues to decline."

A total of eight deaths involved on-road motor vehicle accidents, making it the largest single category of fatalities. The industry with the most deaths (eight) was agriculture, forestry, and fishing. The oldest worker to die was a 71-year-old equipment operator whose road grader overturned. The youngest worker was an 18-year-old logging skidder operator who died when he fell off a skidder and was run over.

"Oregon's continued success in reducing worker deaths, reflected during recent years, shows that workplace safety and health management programs work," said Michael Wood, administrator of the DCBS Occupational Safety and Health Division. "But the numbers also remind us that the job is far from done. Too many of these deaths are not only preventable, but easily preventable if employers and their employees work together to ensure that workplace risks are reduced and, where possible, eliminated."

The state compiles fatality statistics from records of death claim benefits paid by Oregon workers' compensation insurers during the calendar year. The data reported may exclude workplace fatalities involving self-employed individuals, city of Portland police and fire employees, federal employees, and incidents occurring in Oregon to individuals with out-of-state employers. These individuals are either not subject to Oregon workers' compensation coverage requirements or are covered instead by other compensation systems. Deaths that occur during a prior calendar year may appear in the compensable fatality count for a later year because of the time required to process a claim.

Complete data on all deaths caused by injuries in Oregon workplaces, regardless of whether they are covered by workers' compensation insurance, are computed separately and reported in the annual Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) administered by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The 2005 CFOI report is not expected until the fall of 2006.

The Department of Consumer and Business Services regulates workplace safety through its Occupational Safety and Health Division (Oregon OSHA). Oregon OSHA offers consultation, training, and other technical services to help employers improve safety and reduce costs from workplace injuries. DCBS also administers the state's workers' compensation system and regulates workers' compensation insurers.