

Workers Speak Out on Injury Reporting & Safety Incentive Programs

Safety, incentives, and the reporting of work-related injuries among union carpenters: “You’re pretty much screwed if you get hurt at work”

Hester Lipscomb, PhD, Duke University. Am J of Indus Med. Published online October 25, 2012; print edition forthcoming.

Overview

Researchers surveyed 1,020 carpenter apprentices in Chicago, downstate Illinois, and St. Louis to assess the extent of injury reporting and underreporting and the impact of safety incentive programs in the region’s construction industry. Less than half of workers (46.4%) reported that injuries were reported “always” or “most of the time,” with a majority (53.6%) reporting that injuries were “sometimes,” “rarely,” or “never” reported. Fifteen (15%) acknowledged knowing of coworkers who had been injured on the job but sought medical care through private insurance rather than filing a workers’ compensation claim. The apprentices’ comments reflected a widespread fear of reprisal for reporting accidents and injuries. Most workers (58%) reported programs that disciplined workers who reported accidents – or rewarded those who did not – on their current job site. Researchers found significant evidence that programs disciplining workers for accidents discouraged reporting them.

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See abstract:

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Key Findings

- Thirty percent (30%) of workers reported that accidents were “rarely” or “almost never” reported. Many offered comments suggesting that workers who reported accidents and/or filed workers compensation claims would be fired or face other retaliation (see below).
- Fifteen percent (15%) of respondents were aware of coworkers who had been injured on the job but sought treatment through private insurance rather than workers’ compensation.
- Fifty-eight percent (58%) of surveyed carpenters reported some incentive or disincentive program for control of work-related injuries on their current jobsite.

Remarks from Employees:

- “If you get hurt and report it you will be replaced.”
- “You are pretty much screwed if you get hurt at work. You will probably get workers’ comp but you will most likely never go back to work for the company for an extended period of time.”
- “The term ‘fired before you hit the ground’ is used too much in our industry.”
- “I got the impression, which was strongly implied, if I got hurt I was no longer employed.”
- “They want it faster and if you are injured, go home and don’t report it. There are a lot of other guys in line to replace you.”



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