

- Occupational Illnesses in Connecticut stable over the last two years after decreasing from 2005 levels
- But Still Higher than National Average
- Repetitive Motion continues as the most common complaint

FARMINGTON, CONN. – Nearly 4,000 Connecticut workers reported an on-the-job related illness in 2007, about the same as the year before, according to a State Labor Department/Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) survey. According to the Occupational Disease Report prepared for the Connecticut Workers' Compensation Commission by Tim Morse, Ph.D. and Paula Schenck, MPH, of the University of Connecticut Health Center, the overall illness rate in Connecticut of 29.4 per 10,000 workers was higher than the national average of 21.8. This was driven by Connecticut's higher rates of hearing loss, respiratory conditions and repetitive trauma injuries like carpal tunnel syndrome and tendonitis. Connecticut scored lower than the national average for poisonings, and skin disorders.

"Tracking occupational diseases is the best way to help identify problems that are preventable," says UConn Health Center occupational and environmental expert Tim Morse, Ph.D. "But they are typically harder to detect than injuries since they often occur over longer periods of time and can have multiple (including non-occupational) risks. It is extremely important for these diseases to be reported so we can understand what's happening in the workplace and begin to fix it."

Workers in the manufacturing sector (63.6 per 10,000 workers) and local government (59.8 per 10,000 workers) reported the highest number of occupational illnesses, mainly due to repetitive trauma, skin, respiratory illnesses and hearing loss. Education and health professions and state government employees also had more occupational illness than the CT average.

Lost-time musculoskeletal disorders (MSD), which includes strains and sprains, stayed about the same as the year before, but the Connecticut rate of 52 per 10,000 workers is 47 percent higher than the national MSD rate of 35.4.

"Occupational disease can have major impacts on worker health, ability to work, and employer costs," explains Morse. "Some diseases, such as cancers from asbestos exposure, can be fatal. Other diseases, such as carpal tunnel syndrome from ergonomic problems, can result in high levels of disability. Prevention efforts can reduce both diseases and costs because, in theory at least, all occupational diseases are preventable."

The report is part of the Occupational Disease Surveillance System, a cooperative effort between the Connecticut Workers' Compensation Commission, the Connecticut Department of Public Health, the Connecticut Labor Department, the academic occupational health programs at the University of Connecticut Health Center and Yale University, and other state occupational health clinics. The system is designed to trace and prevent occupational disease. The report includes a "Who's Who" of contact information for agencies and programs in occupational health and safety in Connecticut, as well as a list of the most useful websites nationally.

A free copy of the "Occupational Disease in Connecticut: 2009" report that reflects data for 2007, is available at <http://www.oehc.uchc.edu/news.asp>, or call the Workers' Compensation Commission at 860-493-1500, or Morse at 860-679-4720.

The University of Connecticut Health Center includes the schools of medicine and dental medicine, the UConn Medical Group, University Dentists, and John Dempsey Hospital. Founded in 1961, the Health Center pursues a mission of providing outstanding health care education in an environment of exemplary patient care, research and public service. To learn more about the UConn Health Center, visit our website at <http://www.uchc.edu>

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