

Most dangerous jobs in the U.S.: The top 20



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Logging is not only the most dangerous job in America – it's 31 times more dangerous than the average job nationwide. That's one of the findings of a [study recently completed by AdvisorSmith](#), which used data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries¹ and the Current Population Survey² to determine the most hazardous jobs, based on fatal injury rates.

AdvisorSmith, a business insurance advisor, found that workers in many of the most dangerous jobs earn average salaries that are well below the May 2017 annual mean wage of \$50,620, “belying the notion that more dangerous jobs would be higher paying, compensating for risk.” The study also found that self-employed workers are four-and-a-half times more likely to die on the job compared with hourly and salaried workers.

Here, according to the study, are the most dangerous occupations in the U.S.:

1. Logging workers

Fatal injury rate: 109.3 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 55

Salary: \$38,840

Most common fatal accidents: Contact with objects and equipment

Logging workers harvest forests to provide the raw material for goods such as wood, paper, and cardboard, in addition to other industrial products. These workers spend almost all of their time outside in forests and other isolated areas.

Logging workers use heavy machinery to fell trees and handle logs. Logging worker deaths are most often caused by contact with logging machines or logs.

2. Fishers and related fishing workers

Fatal injury rate: 74.2 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 41

Salary: \$28,310

Most common fatal accidents: Transportation incidents

Fishing workers are responsible for catching fish and other marine animals. In this work, fishers use equipment to find fish, navigate boats, maintain engines and fishing gear, and catch and sort fish.

Fishing workers usually work on a body of water, and can be exposed to hazardous weather including storms, fog, and wind. The most common cause of occupational death for fishers is drowning.

3. Sailors and marine oilers

Fatal injury rate: 55.1 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 9

Salary: \$40,730

Most common fatal accidents: Transportation incidents

Sailors are responsible for the operations of boats and ships. Their work includes standing watch, taking measurements, steering and navigating marine vessels, as well as helping maintain the ship’s equipment. Often, sailors spend significant amounts of time at sea (weeks or months) and can be exposed to many different weather conditions.

The most common cause of occupational death for sailors is drowning.

4. Aircraft pilots and flight engineers

Fatal injury rate: 50.4 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 59

Salary: \$111,930

Most common fatal accidents: Transportation incidents

Aircraft pilots fly and navigate airplanes, helicopters, and other types of aircraft. In this profession, pilots are responsible for checking the condition of aircraft before and after flights, ensuring the aircraft is balanced, and planning for fuel and flight plans. Pilots also operate the aircraft, communicate with air traffic control, and monitor the aircraft's systems during flight.

The majority of aircraft pilot fatalities occur in crashes of privately owned planes.

5. Paving, surfacing, and tamping equipment operators

Fatal injury rate: 46.7 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 12

Salary: \$39,120

Most common fatal accidents: Transportation incidents

Paving and surfacing operators operate heavy equipment used to construct surfaces such as roads, parking lots, sidewalks, and driveways. These workers may do work such as spreading asphalt and paving concrete, where they are responsible for creating a smooth surface and ensuring that the material is applied evenly. Additionally, tamping, which is a method of compacting materials to provide a base for roadbeds or railroads, is another important type of work they perform.

Occupational deaths of these workers occur due to getting hit by construction equipment or in crashes with other motor vehicles.

6. Dredge, excavating, and loading machine operators

Fatal injury rate: 42.4 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 13

Salary: \$42,950

Most common fatal accidents: Contact with objects and equipment

Dredge, excavating, and loading machine operators also operate heavy construction equipment. Excavating and loading equipment is used on construction sites and in mines to move material around. Dredge operators use their equipment to excavate waterways, removing sand, gravel, and rocks from lakes and harbors in order to keep waterways deep enough for boats.

Dredge operator fatalities often occur when dredge equipment becomes unstable and sinks.

7. Derrick, rotary drill, and service unit operators, oil, gas, and mining

Fatal injury rate: 40.1 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 10

Salary: \$49,000

Most common fatal accidents: Transportation incidents

These oil workers setup, maintain, and operate the derrick and drill equipment used to extract oil and gas, as well as mine for materials. The derrick is the structure above a well that holds the drilling equipment, while the drill rotates to displace the earth. The derrick may also include pumps to extract the oil or other materials from the well.

Transportation incidents were the leading cause of death for these workers.

8. Other transportation workers

Fatal injury rate: 39.2 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 8

Salary: \$24,480

Most common fatal accidents: Transportation incidents

Other transportation workers are a classification of worker who works in transportation but who is not counted separately in a Bureau of Labor Statistics job title. These workers most commonly die in transportation incidents while on the job.

9. Roofers

Fatal injury rate: 39.0 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 91

Salary: \$38,970

Most common fatal accidents: Falls, slips, trips

Roofers are responsible for installing, repairing, and replacing roofs of homes and buildings. Their work involves taking roofing materials such as shingles, metal, or other materials onto roofs and securing them. Roofers generally must use ladders or other equipment to climb on top of buildings.

The most common cause of fatal work injury for roofers is falling off roofs.

10. Maintenance workers, machinery

Fatal injury rate: 37.4 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 9

Salary: \$45,540

Most common fatal accidents: Contact with objects and equipment

Maintenance workers who service machinery require specialized tools and equipment. These workers monitor equipment to diagnose problems, inspect equipment to identify damage, and disassemble and reassemble machinery. Maintenance workers require specialized training and on-the-job experience to learn how to do their jobs properly.

The most common causes of death for maintenance workers are contact with equipment.

11. Woodworking machine setters, operators, and tenders

Fatal injury rate: 35.9 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 6

Salary: \$29,100

Most common fatal accidents: Contact with objects and equipment

Woodworking machine operators are responsible for operating woodworking equipment which processes wood. Some of these machines include drill presses, lathes, shapers, routers, sanders, and planers. The operators feed the machines with raw materials and monitor the machines and make adjustments.

Fatal incidents for woodworking machine operators are generally caused by contact with equipment.

12. Septic tank servicers and sewer pipe cleaners

Fatal injury rate: 34.3 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 0

Salary: \$37,950

Most common fatal accidents: Contact with objects and equipment

Septic tank servicers clean and repair septic tanks and sewer lines. They may repair the walls of septic tanks or repair broken underground pipes. These workers may use smaller industrial equipment such as water jets, sewer flushers, and power rodders.

Contact with equipment is the most common cause of death on the job for these workers.

13. Refuse and recyclable material collectors

Fatal injury rate: 31.9 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 30

Salary: \$36,160

Most common fatal accidents: Transportation incidents

Also known as garbage collectors, refuse and recyclable material collectors collect our trash and recycling. Generally, these workers will drive a truck through neighborhoods and empty garbage bins and dumpsters into the trucks. Many bins are loaded by hand, while some trucks have mechanical lifters. Garbage collectors then drive the trucks to a landfill or waste transfer station where the waste is unloaded from the truck.

The most common cause of death for these workers is being struck by a garbage truck or other vehicle.

14. Structural iron and steel workers

Fatal injury rate: 28.0 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 14

Salary: \$52,610

Most common fatal accidents: Falls, slips, trips

Ironworkers are responsible for installing iron and steel on buildings, bridges, and roads. Their work often consists of climbing up on large structures, unloading iron and steel, and signaling to crane operators. They also use equipment to cut, bend, and weld iron and steel. Steel and iron are one of the primary reinforcing materials for large scale buildings.

Falls are the most common fatal occupational accident for structural iron and steel workers.

15. Driver/sales workers and truck drivers

Fatal injury rate: 26.0 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 987

Salary: \$37,610

Most common fatal accidents: Transportation incidents

Delivery drivers load and unload trucks and drive them to their destination within a local area. These workers generally pick up cargo from distribution centers and deliver them to homes and businesses. They also may communicate with customers to coordinate deliveries, collect payment for goods, and process paperwork such as delivery signatures.

Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death on the job for driver/sales workers and truck drivers.

16. Farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural managers

Fatal injury rate: 25.6 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 258

Salary: \$69,620

Most common fatal accidents: Transportation incidents

Farmers are responsible for producing crops, dairy products, and raising animals for food. They are responsible for the process of planting and harvesting or feeding and caring for livestock. Additionally, farmers purchase supplies for their farms and purchase and maintain farming equipment. They also sell their crops or livestock on the open market.

Crashes, including tractor crashes, were the most common fatal injury for farmers.

17. Rail-track laying and maintenance equipment operators

Fatal injury rate: 25.4 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 3

Salary: \$56,060

Rail-track laying and maintenance equipment operators are responsible for keeping railroads in good working order. Their job consists of maintaining the tracks, signals, and switches, keeping them in good working order. They also weld together tracks and replace sections that need to be fixed.

18. Reinforcing iron and rebar workers

Fatal injury rate: 25 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 3

Salary: \$46,850

Reinforcing iron and rebar workers work on structures, buildings, highways, and bridges that are primarily concrete. They are responsible for positioning and installing steel bars or steel mesh that reinforces concrete. These workers use tools such as fasteners, rod-bending machines, blowtorches, saws, and metal shears to cut and form steel.

19. Riggers

Fatal injury rate: 24.4 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 1

Salary: \$48,580

Riggers are workers who lift and move very large and heavy items, usually using a crane, derrick, or hoist. They are responsible for securing items to be lifted and can work on construction projects, logging yards, shipyards, or in the entertainment industry. Riggers must have an understanding of engineering and math, in order to calculate the weight and size of materials that can be safely lifted or moved.

20. First-line supervisors of farming, fishing, and forestry workers

Fatal injury rate: 23.1 per 100,000 workers

Total deaths (2017): 11

Salary: \$46,570

Most common fatal accidents: Transportation incidents

Farming, fishing, and forestry supervisors are managers on farms, ships, or logging teams. These managers are responsible for monitoring workers to ensure safety regulations are being followed, as well as training workers to farm, fish, or fell logs. They also assign duties to the workers and review their work to ensure it is being done safely and properly.

About the study

Salary data came from the Occupational Employment Statistics Survey³.

Sources

[1] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries

[2] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey

[3] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics Survey

KEYWORDS: occupational fatalities workplace deaths

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