

Federal figures miss most work-related amputations

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A new report from Michigan State University and the Michigan Department of Community Health raises significant concerns about the federal government's system for tracking work-related injuries.

Published in the [Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine](#), the study found the number of amputations following jobsite accidents in Michigan was nearly two-and-a-half times higher than the official estimate from the U.S. [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).

Such inaccuracy is evidence that the bureau should change its system that relies solely on a sample of employers to report injuries, ignores medical information from hospitals and emergency departments and doesn't capture data from the self-employed, said Kenneth Rosenman, chief of the Division of Occupational and Environmental Medicine in MSU's College of Human Medicine.

The university participated in the study in its role as Michigan's official agent for tracking work-related health information. [Health care providers](#) are required by law to report certain conditions to the state. MSU collects those reports and other data and initiates follow-up investigations where needed.

The researchers analyzed hospital records and workers' compensation data and determined there were 616 work-related amputations in 2008. The federal estimate was 250 amputations. That figure was based on surveys that a sample of Michigan employers were required to complete.

"The first principle of public health is to know how much and where," added Rosenman, who co-authored the study with Thomas Largo of the Department of Community Health. "If your numbers are not accurate on how much of a problem there is, how do you know where to deploy your resources, or judge if any of your programs are successful in addressing the problem?"

Rosenman said the Bureau of Labor Statistics changed its survey-based system for tracking work-related deaths after it was shown to miss half of deaths in an embarrassing 1988 [National Academy of Sciences](#) report. The following year the bureau found twice as many deaths by using multiple data sources, such as police reports and death certificates. Yet, it continues to use only employer survey data for nonfatal work-related injuries and illnesses.

"I'm a firm believer in using multiple data sources," Rosenman said. "The federal government could extrapolate from states like Michigan and others that have a comprehensive system and come up with a much better system for the country."

Provided by Michigan State University

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