

# Massachusetts FACE Occupational Fatality Facts

Massachusetts Department of Public Health  
Occupational Health Surveillance Program  
Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation Project



## Fatal Work- related Injuries among Brazilians in Massachusetts 1999-2007

This fact sheet summarizes information from Massachusetts on fatal work-related injuries among Brazilian-born workers.<sup>i</sup> Little information has been publicly available about fatal injuries among this group of workers to date. In Massachusetts, as in the U.S. as a whole, Hispanic workers have been found to have high rates of fatal work-related injuries compared to non-Hispanic white workers.<sup>1,2</sup> However, deaths of Brazilian born-workers may or may not be included in the Hispanic fatality count and are not generally reported separately.<sup>ii</sup>

Brazilians are the most populous newcomer group in Massachusetts post - 1990.<sup>3</sup> According to data from Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies, from 2000 through 2003 Brazilians accounted for 19% of all new immigrants to the Commonwealth.<sup>4</sup> Brazilians come to Massachusetts seeking work, but like many other immigrants, are more likely than native-born workers to be employed in dangerous jobs where hazards are inadequately controlled. Other factors are also believed to contribute to immigrants' risk of being hurt at work. These include inadequate safety training and supervision of workers, often compounded by language and literacy barriers, as well as immigrant workers' lack of information about safety and health standards and legal rights. Long work hours, job insecurity, and racial and ethnic discrimination in the workplace may also contribute to elevated risks of on-the job injuries, and the combination of several of these factors may make immigrant workers hesitant to speak up.<sup>5,6,7,8</sup>

### Fatal Injury Cases

From 1991, when the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Occupational Health Surveillance Program (OHSP) first began tracking fatal work-related injuries, through 1998, no deaths of Brazilian-born workers were recorded. In contrast, from 1999 through 2007, 15 Brazilian-born workers were fatally injured at work in Massachusetts.<sup>iii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Brazilian-born workers in this report are defined on the basis of country of birth as reported on death certificates.

<sup>ii</sup> Deaths of Brazilian-born workers may or may not be included in Hispanic worker fatality counts depending on how the ethnicity of these workers is reported. Brazilians are Portuguese speakers who do not usually identify as Hispanic but are sometimes classified as such and included in Hispanic worker counts. Of the 15 deaths among Brazilian-born workers in Massachusetts described in this report, two were classified as Hispanic based on the ethnicity recorded on the death certificates.

<sup>iii</sup> Summary statistics are from the Massachusetts Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries conducted by the Occupational Health Surveillance Program at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, in collaboration with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The fatality case reports are provided by the Massachusetts Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation Project, also conducted by the Occupational Health Surveillance Program, with support from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (Cooperative Agreement: U60/OH00840).



## ***Construction***

- A 38-year-old male construction laborer employed by a construction company fell approximately 40 feet from the roof of a four-story residential building when he slipped while throwing a door from the roof into a dumpster below.
- A 41-year-old male laborer employed by a construction company was crushed between a backhoe and a dump truck while repairing a roadway manhole.
- A 42-year-old male carpenter employed by a building company fell 19 feet to the ground below from the second story of a new residential building.
- A 24-year-old male roofer employed by a residential construction company fell approximately 16 feet from scaffolding while re-shingling the roof of a house.
- A 57-year-old male carpenter employed by a finish carpentry company fell approximately 12 feet to the ground below from a second story porch on a new residential building. He was re-installing the porch's railings which were originally installed improperly.
- A 30-year-old male bricklayer was working inside scaffolding enclosed by a tarp on a residential construction site. While crouching down to exit underneath the scaffold's tarp, he was struck by a passing skid steer loader.
- A 27-year-old male construction worker employed by a masonry company fell approximately 130 feet from the scaffold platform he and a co-worker were dismantling. The scaffold collapsed when the last metal support affixing the scaffold to the new residential building was removed.
- A 40-year-old male roofer employed by a roofing company was electrocuted when the 32-foot aluminum extension ladder he was unloading from a pickup truck came in contact with an overhead power line at a residential work site.

## ***Other Industries***

- A 37-year-old male laborer employed by an earth recycling company was sweeping the ground next to a rock crushing machine when his arm became caught between the machine's conveyor belt and an idler pulley.
- A 36-year-old male landscaper employed by a landscaping company for the day climbed a tree and was cutting some of the upper branches when the base of the tree gave way causing the tree and the victim to fall approximately 30 feet to a paved driveway.
- A 48-year-old male shipper employed by a bakery fell from a step ladder he was using to access an upper shelf inside a walk-in freezer.
- A 41-year-old male laborer employed by a ventilation, heating and air conditioning company fell 20 feet from an extension ladder while drilling a fresh air vent in the roof of a new residential building.
- A 38-year-old male stone cutter employed by a granite product manufacturer was trying to retrieve a granite slab from a holding rack when five granite slabs weighing approximately 5,000 pounds fell over crushing him against a cement table.
- A 35-year-old male cleaner employed by a restaurant arrived at work during a robbery and was fatally stabbed in the chest by the robber.
- A 33-year-old male laborer employed by a sewage and drainage company, was fatally injured when the tractor he was operating at the residential site overturned, pinning him against the ground.

In addition to the above Brazilian-born workers killed on the job, an 18-year-old male retail worker employed by a drugstore was fatally stabbed in the neck while pursuing a shoplifter. The victim's parents were Brazilian and he had lived in Brazil, but had been born in the U.S.

All of these victims were male, between 18 and 59 years of age, and over half (56%) of these men worked in construction. Falls to lower levels accounted for 50% of the deaths. Three of the construction workers were killed by moving vehicles. Two of the deaths were the result of violence in the workplace. The majority of the victims were from Minas Gerais, the state of Brazil that sends the largest number of people to the U.S.

### **Taking Action to Prevent Fatal Injuries at Work**

Importantly, beyond the demographics and the exposures that led to these incidents, many of these deaths could have been prevented if proper safeguards were in place, such as training in safety and work procedures, communication warning systems, and the use of personal protective equipment. In Massachusetts, OHSP, researchers, community organizations and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) are collaborating to reduce the risk of fatal injuries faced by Brazilian workers. Some of these activities are described below.

- OHSP, the Brazilian Immigrant Center (BIC) and the Collaboration for a Better Work Environment for Brazilians (COBWEB) Project are working together to improve the data collected about work-related fatalities; this is an effort to better identify the antecedents and causes of fatal injury, and in particular, identify factors that may be amenable to intervention.
- The Brazilian Immigrant Center has entered into an Alliance with OSHA Region I to train Portuguese-speaking construction workers on workplace health and safety. To date, this initiative has resulted in the training of more than 180 workers in OSHA's 10-hour course.
- Activists and journalists in the Brazilian community have aggressively publicized the deaths of Brazilian workers, collaborating successfully with community-based media sources (radio, newspaper, and television) to make workplace safety an issue that is discussed in the community.
- OHSP, in collaboration with BIC and COBWEB, produces bilingual Portuguese/English Safety Alerts describing and discussing cases of work-related deaths among Brazilians. These materials have been used to educate the Brazilian community about workplace hazards and prevention strategies. Additional health and safety materials in Portuguese developed by OHSP include:
  - *Compensação ao Trabalhador em Massachusetts*  
(Workers' Compensation in Massachusetts)
  - *Quedas: A Maior Causa de Acidentes Mortais em Locais de Construção*  
(Falls: The Leading Killer on Construction Sites)
  - *Medidas de Segurança a Tomar com Escadas*  
(Ladder Safety for Residential Contractors)

- Medidas de Segurança a Tomar com Andaimés  
(Scaffold Safety for Residential Construction Contractors)
- Fatos do FACE: Trabalhador morreu ao ser esmagado por placas de granite –  
Massachusetts  
(FACE FACTS: Worker killed when crushed by multiple granite slabs –  
Massachusetts)
- Fatos do FACE: Instalador de telhado é electrocutado quando uma escada de  
extensão de alumino tocou uma linha de force energizada que estava acima de  
sua cabeça – Massachusetts  
(FACE Facts: Roofer electrocuted when aluminum extension ladder contacts  
overhead power line – Massachusetts)
- Cartaz: Primeros Socorros a Queimaduras em Restaurantes  
(Poster: First Aid for Burns in Restaurants)

## **Health and Safety Resources for Workers and Employers in Massachusetts**

### Massachusetts Division of Occupational Safety

Offers free consultation services to help employers to improve their safety and health programs and train employees.

(617) 969-7177

[www.mass.gov/dos/consult](http://www.mass.gov/dos/consult)

### Massachusetts Department of Industrial Accidents

Has grants available for providing workplace health and safety training to employers/employees in companies covered by the Massachusetts Workers' Compensation Insurance Law.

(617) 727-4900

[www.mass.gov/dia/Safety](http://www.mass.gov/dia/Safety)

### Occupational Health Surveillance Program, Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Has data on work-related deaths and educational materials for residential contractors and other workers on workplace safety and health, including a number of educational materials in Portuguese. (See above.)

(617) 624-5632

[www.mass.gov/dph/ohsp](http://www.mass.gov/dph/ohsp)

### Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Regional Offices

North Boston Area Office

(617) 565-8110

South Boston Area Office

(617) 565-6924

Springfield Area Office

(413) 785-0123

### Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH)

Offers training and technical assistance to workers and advocates for health and safety legislation and policy to improve protections for workers. MassCOSH's worker center provides health and safety training and assistance to immigrant workers seeking to address unsafe conditions, injuries and worker rights.

(617) 825-7233

[www.masscosh.org](http://www.masscosh.org)

## Brazilian Immigrant Center

Works to organize and strengthen the Brazilian community in Massachusetts and supports the development of community leaders.

(617) 783-8001

[www.braziliancenter.org](http://www.braziliancenter.org)

## Collaboration for a Better Work Environment for Brazilians (COBWEB) Project

This research project carried out by U Mass Lowell in partnership with the Brazilian Immigrant Center, MassCOSH and OSHA, compiled information about the health and safety of Brazilian immigrant workers in Massachusetts. To access this information go to the COBWEB website.

[www.cobwebproject.org](http://www.cobwebproject.org)

## National Resources:

Electronic Library of Construction Occupational Safety and Health (eLCOSH)

[www.cdc.gov/elcosh](http://www.cdc.gov/elcosh)

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

[www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html)

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

[www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)

## References

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- <sup>4</sup> Sum, Andrew et al. The Changing Face of Massachusetts. Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth / Center for Labor Market Studies of Northeastern University. June 2005.
- <sup>5</sup> Friedmand-Gimenez, George. Achieving Environmental Justice: The Role of Occupational Health. *Fordham Urban Law Journal*. Vol XXI, pp. 605-631. 1993-1994.
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