

# Hispanics dying on job at higher rates than others

June 5, 2008, 2:02PM By MIKE STOBBE Associated Press

ATLANTA — Hispanic workers die at higher rates than other laborers, with 1 in 3 of these deaths occurring in the construction industry, a government study reported today.

Hispanics tend to hold more high-risk jobs than those in other racial groups, but language and literacy barriers and poor training and supervision may also be factors, researchers said. The leading causes of death in recent years have been falls and highway-related accidents. "Many of the Hispanic workers in construction are undocumented, and many of those who are recently arrived do face a language barrier," said Rakesh Kochhar, associated director for research at the Pew Hispanic Center.

"A language barrier hinders understanding of a job, or the risks associated with it, or safety precautions," said Kochhar, who was not part of the new study.

The study was done by health researchers in Massachusetts, Michigan and New Jersey and at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It's being published this week in the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

The study counted more than 11,000 Hispanic work-related deaths nationwide from 1992-2006. The data were culled from death certificates, police reports, workers' compensation reports and other sources.

The researchers calculated an annual death rate of 5 per 100,000 Hispanic workers in 2006. But the rate for foreign-born Hispanics, roughly 6 per 100,000, was far higher than the 3.5 for those born in the United States.

The rate for non-Hispanic white workers was 4. For blacks, it was 3.7. "The burden of risk is primarily on foreign-born workers," said Scott Richardson, a Bureau of Labor Statistics program director, in a telephone press conference today about the new report.

From 1992-96, murder on the job was the most common cause of death among Hispanic workers, with crimes like convenience store robberies contributing heavily to that tally.

Then highway accidents became the leading type of work-related fatality. Falls also have become common, and were the leading cause of death in 2000 and 2006.

An analysis of the most recent deaths, from 2003-06, found that 2 of every 3 Hispanic workers who died on the job were foreign-born. That's up from 1992, when immigrants accounted for about half of Hispanic work-related deaths.

In recent years, about 70 percent of the foreign-born fatalities were from Mexico.

In 2003 through 2006, the highest numbers of Hispanic work-related deaths were in California, with 773 deaths; Texas, with 687; and Florida, with 417.

But the highest death rate for Hispanic workers was in South Carolina, at about 23 per 100,000. A recent influx of primarily foreign-born workers might account for that, experts said.

Hispanics make up about 14 percent of the nation's working age population, according to a report this week by the Pew Hispanic Center, a Washington-based research organization.