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LOGGING INJURIES CONTINUE DOWNWARD TREND

Safety: logging

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INTRODUCTION: Since 1996, researchers at Virginia Tech, with financial support from FRA's Timber Harvesting and Transportation Safety Foundation, have used Workers' Compensation Insurance (WCI) claims data from cooperating insurance providers to determine the annual accident and injury rate (Total Case Incident Rate, or TCIR) for mechanized logging operations in the South (see previous FRA Technical Releases 99-R-2; 00-R-2; 01-R-12; 02-R-15). The TCIR is the U.S. Labor Department's standard measure for reporting workplace injuries within an industry or industry segment and represents the average number of injuries incurred by 100 workers during a year.

FINDINGS: Using a broad random "blended" sample of the annual number of injuries reported by 331 mechanized (feller-buncher/grapple skidder) logging firms operating across 12 Southern states, the 2001 TCIR was calculated to be 5.0 injuries per 100 workers. As the graph below illustrates, this finding continues an impressive six-year trend of improved logging safety and reduced accidents and injuries.

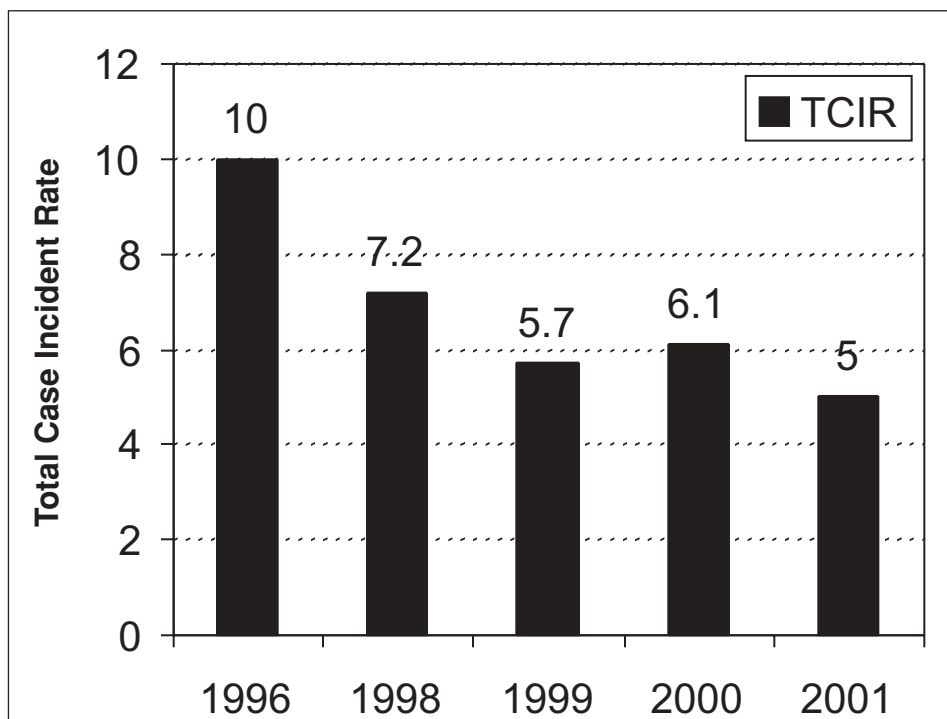


Fig. 1: The U.S. Department of Labor's measurement of logging injury rates nationally shows a significant decline over this five-year period.



DISCUSSION: Employees of mechanized logging operations in the South are 50 percent less likely to be injured on the job today than they were just seven years ago! This outstanding achievement in workplace safety over a relatively short time period testifies to the growing commitment to safety and high level of professionalism found among the vast majority of today's independent logging contractors. As previously reported, other factors likely contributing to the reduced incidence of logging injuries are:

- Increased mechanization, fewer workers on the ground, and reduced exposure to manual chain saw felling and delimiting.
- Increased participation in logging safety training programs at all levels.
- A "hard-line" attitude on safety compliance by many Workers' Compensation Insurance providers.
- Increased emphasis on worker safety and comfort by logging equipment designers and manufacturers.
- Depressed market conditions have driven a number of inefficient loggers (presumably with poorer safety records) out of business over the past five years.

While the overall rate at which injuries occur on mechanized operations has decreased substantially, the likelihood that an alarming number of logging injuries will be severe enough to result in a fatality continues to cause concern (see FRA Technical Release 02-R-3). Further work is ongoing at Virginia Tech to look into this important issue.

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