Narrator: Thanks to workers' rights and public health movements, the passage of workplace safety standards, and advances in technology, workplaces have become dramatically safer places during the last century. However, workers still get sick and injured on the job and oftentimes such injuries – and deaths – are completely preventable. I'm here today with Tom St. Louis, Supervisor of the Connecticut Department of Public Health's Occupational Health Unit, to talk about workplace illnesses and injuries.

Hi Tom, can you tell us a little bit about the scope of workplace illnesses and injuries and how many workers are affected?

Tom: Sure. We don't have really great data on non-fatal work-related injuries, but our best estimates are about 4% of workers each year suffer injuries or illnesses in the work place. That seems like a low number, but in Connecticut, that's about 68,000 workers every year, and over five and a half million workers in the U.S. There are also estimates and research that says that those numbers may be about 70% higher based on some additional data we have. We have better data on fatal injuries, obviously those are more severe and more newsworthy a lot of times, so they aren't missed. About one worker a week in Connecticut, on average, dies from a fatal incident at work. That's not including chronic diseases, but just things like falling off roofs or getting crushed by machinery or electrocuted. So, about one worker a week in Connecticut and as many as 100 workers a week throughout the entire U.S.

Narrator: Wow, that's a lot of people. So, what role does public health have in the workplace compared to OSHA or other agencies?

Tom: Really, the role we have is a non-regulatory role. So, OSHA and some other regulatory agencies have standards that they are bound by. When they go into workplaces, they obviously can make citations and fines for standards that are on the books for those agencies. We have a lot more freedom in terms of recognizing best practices in the workplace for health and safety, and for recommending those practices to employers in our state, so that's really the occupational public health role versus the regulatory role that OSHA and some other agencies have.

Narrator: What are some of the things that the Occupational Health Unit does to help keep workplaces healthier?

Tom: Well, one thing we do is collect and analyze a lot of data from a lot of different data sources. Like I said, there's no good single source for non-fatal, or even fatal, work-related injuries so we collect data from a lot of different sources and put together what we call "occupational health indicators." Then we look at that data to try to find different areas of concern, either particular injuries or illnesses that we

think are a concern from the standpoint of affecting other workers in the workplace, or just larger than normal outbreaks or occurrences of illnesses or injuries in workplaces.

The second thing we do is also provide free, non-regulatory workplace hazard assessments in workplaces here in Connecticut. So employers can request those from our agency and we'll come in and do as thorough a job as you would like in terms of looking over safety and health aspects of the work place and help employers improve those safety and health features in their workplaces.

Narrator: Is there anything that we, as workers, can do to make our workplaces safer?

Tom: Well, actually workers are required by OSHA to keep their workplaces safe. A lot of people think of OSHA regulations as an employer function, but there are also regulations from OSHA that say workers have to comply with safety and health standards set out by OSHA and the safety and health rules that are set out by their employers. So, that's one thing that workers can do, obviously, is observe all of those safety and health rules. But, really, the second thing and the most important thing is if you see a health and safety issue in a workplace, something that looks dangerous or hazardous, something that looks out of place or something that might injure or make a worker sick, it's important to speak up and say something to a manager or even to your immediate supervisor or to other workers, and to bring those things forward. A lot of workers are concerned that if they bring up health and safety issues they're going to lose their job, but actually, there are protections for those workers in workplaces, and most employers are appreciative when workers bring those issues to the forefront because in the long run, it saves them money in terms of not having injured workers. Really, to borrow a line from another agency, "If you see something, say something." So, if you see a health and safety issue in your workplace, say something to somebody.

Narrator: Thanks, Tom! For more information about our Occupational Health Unit, please visit our website at www.ct.gov/dph/occupationalhealth or call (860) 509-7740.

It's National Public Health Week. Remember, public health is ROI: Return on Investment. Save Lives, Save Money.