

MOHSS

Montana Occupational Health & Safety Surveillance

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Workplace Safety in Retail Trade

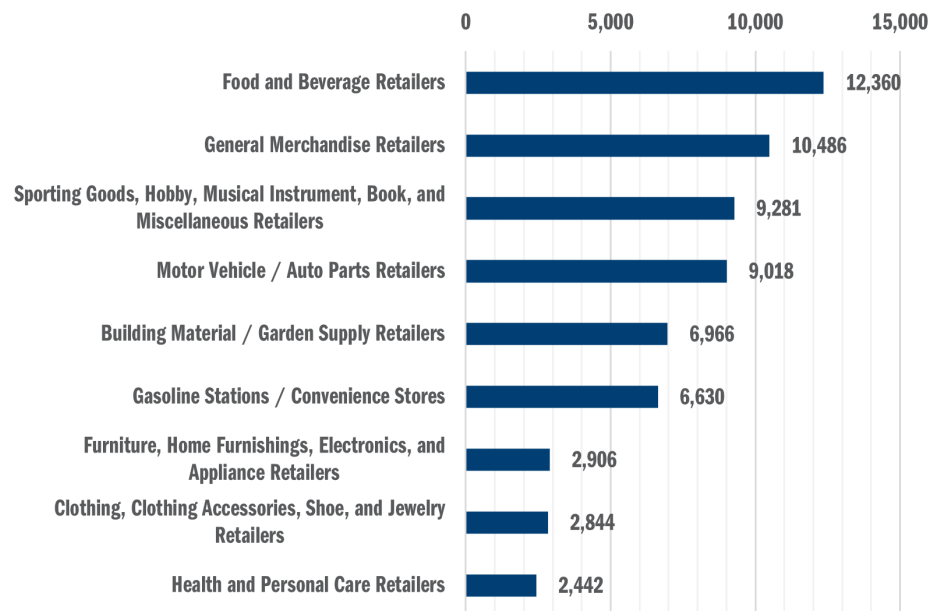
Workers in Montana’s retail trade sector provide crucial services to anyone living in or visiting the state. These workers stock and sell a variety of products, including food, clothing, home goods, furniture, appliances, automobiles, recreational gear, and more. Keeping the needs of consumers met requires keeping workers in retail trade safe from numerous occupational hazards. This newsletter will consider the nature of employment in retail trade, recognizing the common dangers and providing direction to workers and employers to produce the safest workplace possible.



Overview of Employment in the Retail Trade Industry

In 2024, roughly 63,000 people worked in the retail trade industry at over 4,700 establishments around Montana.¹ These workers represent about 12% of the total Montana workforce. Of the nine retail sub-industries identified in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), the most common sources of retail trade employment are food and beverage (i.e. supermarkets and grocery stores) and general merchandise (i.e. department stores). Retail trade workers are employed in all regions of the state. Retail trade employment is almost exclusively private sector, with only a few hundred public sector employees.

Employment in Retail Trade by Sub-Industry

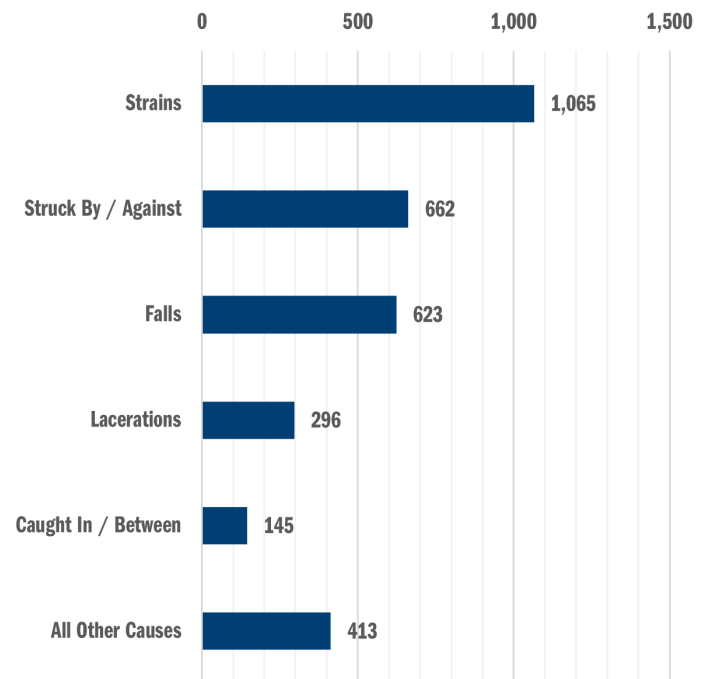


Injuries and Illnesses in Retail Trade

From 2015 to 2024, workers in retail trade reported an average of 3,200 workplace injuries per year to the Montana Department of Labor & Industry.² Retail trade had the second-greatest average number of injuries per year, behind healthcare and social services. The most common sources of injury were lifting strains, contact with falling objects, and same-level falls. Additionally, workers in retail trade exceeded average rates of injury from hand tools (both powered and unpowered) and cumulative injury. 16% of injuries resulted in payout of workers' compensation indemnity benefits, slightly higher than the state average.

Additionally, workers in retail trade also had one of the highest rates of injury or illness in 2024, with 4.6 injuries or illnesses per 100 full-time equivalent workers (tied with manufacturing) and greater than the state average rate of 3.4 injuries per 100 FTE.³ The retail trade industry also reported a higher rate of injuries resulting in time away from work or job restrictions and transfers, with 2.6 injuries per 100 FTE (compared to the state average of 1.7). Rates were highest in general merchandise retail sales.

Annual Average Injuries by Injury Cause



Promoting Safety for Retail Trade Workers

The data on occupational injury and illness in retail trade provides clarity in determining what hazards are causing harm to Montana workers and identifies safety emphasis topics. These include:

- **Proper lifting and handling:** Knowing how to lift and carry heavy loads is vital in nearly all workplaces. Workers in retail trade should be trained to properly lift any object in their workplace, and trained on any lifting aides if necessary. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration has developed numerous guides on lifting in other industries which can be adapted to meet retail trade settings.
- **Fall safety:** Avoiding falls is critical to maintaining a safe and healthy workforce. In retail trade, fall prevention involves maintaining clean and dry walkways and stairwells and providing proper training on the use of ladders or stools. Employers and employees are encouraged to implement guidance on fall prevention provided by safety organizations such as the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).
- **Safe use of tools:** The high prevalence of injury from both powered and unpowered tools for workers in retail trade reflects the necessity of tools (such as drills, hammers, box cutters, screwdrivers, and more) in performing job duties. Workers are encouraged to seek proper training for any tool they are expected to use, and to observe safe working practices promoted by OSHA.

By developing awareness and training on safety in these areas and others, workers and employers in retail trade can develop a safer workplace, reducing the number of injuries and illnesses affecting one of Montana's most essential industries.

¹ Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

² Workers' Compensation Administrative Network, Montana Department of Labor & Industry

³ Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics