What the Latest Injury Data Tell Us: Disabling and Fatal Injury Trends in Federal Jurisdiction in Canada

If you work in Canadian OHS long enough, you develop a habit: when someone says "injuries are up," your next question is always "where," "what kind," and "compared to what."

That is exactly why the federal jurisdiction injury data is worth paying attention to, even if you do not work in a federally regulated workplace every day. It is one of the few Canadian datasets that gives a consistent, apples-to-apples view across a defined set of industries, using the same reporting mechanism year after year. It also has something else going for it: the story behind the numbers is not subtle.

In 2023, federally regulated employers reported 18,796 disabling injuries, up from 18,131 the year before. Fatal injuries rose from 67 to 71. The federal Disabling Injury Frequency Rate (DIFR), which measures disabling injuries per one million hours worked, nudged upward from 7.61 to 7.77. (Canada)

That is the top line. The deeper story is about concentration, exposure, operational recovery after the pandemic, and the uncomfortable truth that prevention tends to lag operational change. When workloads shift fast, safety systems often need time to catch up. In 2023, that gap shows up clearly in the federal data, especially in transportation. Before we jump into trends, let's get clear on what "disabling injury" means federally.

In federal jurisdiction reporting, a disabling injury is not a vague category. It is defined in regulation and is tied to whether an employee is prevented from reporting for work or from effectively performing their regular duties on any day after the day of the injury or illness.

That definition matters because it shapes what gets counted, what gets investigated, and what ends up in annual totals. It also matters because federally regulated employers have specific investigation and reporting obligations tied to disabling injuries. Serious injuries must be reported to the Labour Program within 24 hours, and written investigation reports for temporary and permanent disabling injuries are required within 14 days.

So, when you see a rise in disabling injuries in the federal dataset, you are not looking at a casual metric. You are looking at events that, by definition, affect capacity to work, trigger investigation requirements, and should be feeding corrective action back into prevention programs.

The 2023 Snapshot: Injuries, Deaths, and Hours Worked

The 2023 federal report is built on the Employer's Annual Hazardous Occurrence Report (EAHOR). In total, federally regulated employers reported **41,668 work-related injuries** and about **2.4 billion hours worked**. Those injuries break down into **18,796 disabling injuries (45.1%)**, **71 fatal injuries (0.2%)**, and **22,801 minor injuries (54.7%)**. (Canada)

It is easy to skim past that and only focus on disabling and fatal injuries. Do not. The minor injury count is often where you can see your future. If your minor injuries are rising in a particular business unit while your disabling injuries are flat, that can be your early warning system. The federal dataset does not give you your internal near miss picture, but it does reinforce the logic: if half of reported injuries are "minor," your real prevention leverage is still upstream.

Now, here is where the story sharpens. Disabling injuries are highly concentrated in a few industries.

In 2023, the five industries with the largest shares of total disabling injuries were: **Road Transportation (6,813, 36.2%)**, **Air Transportation (4,413, 23.5%)**, **Federal Public Service (3,218, 17.1%)**, **Postal Services and Postal Contractors (1,514, 8.1%)**, and **Communications (1,041, 5.5%)**. Together, those five accounted for **90.4%** of all disabling injuries in the federal jurisdiction that year.

That is not a "distributed" injury problem. That is an injury problem dominated by a small number of operational environments.

On fatalities, the largest single contributor was again Road Transportation, with 35 fatal injuries in 2023, followed by the Federal Public Service with 14, then Air Transportation with 7. The report also notes that there was one additional fatality related to harassment and violence reported through the separate harassment and violence occurrence reporting stream.

If you are an OHS professional, you should read those numbers with a specific lens. Concentration tells you where prevention effort will generate the biggest return, and where regulators and courts will expect the most mature programs. The part many teams miss? Hours worked are up, but not evenly.

The federal report points out that economic activity in the federal jurisdiction showed signs of post-pandemic recovery in 2023, including surpassing pre-pandemic levels with roughly 200 million more hours worked compared to 2019.

That sounds like good news, but it creates a predictable safety risk: when hours ramp up, exposure ramps up. Your job is to make sure your controls and supervision ramp up at the same rate.

The data makes another important point: not all federally regulated industries recovered the same way. Some industries remained below pre-pandemic hours worked in 2023, including air and rail transportation, longshoring and port operations, and postal services.

So, we have two competing forces happening at once:

- Some sectors are still rebuilding operations and staffing patterns.
- Some are pushing into high tempo work again, with new hires, changed processes, and pressure to meet service expectations.

That mix is exactly where injuries tend to rise, because "we are back to normal" is usually not true in the ways that matter for safety. The work may be back, but the experience base may not be. The equipment may be back, but maintenance cycles and refresher training may be overdue. The staffing may be back, but the supervision ratios might be worse than they were.

This is the kind of context that turns a small increase in a frequency rate into a bigger warning. The federal report is unusually direct about what drove the net increase in disabling injuries from 2022 to 2023.

Yes, there were increases in several industries. But the net increase of 665 disabling injuries was "overwhelmingly attributed" to a single story: a sharp increase in the Air Transportation industry.

Air Transportation disabling injuries rose from 3,020 in 2022 to 4,413 in 2023, a 46.1% increase, while hours worked rose 18.9%. The Air Transportation DIFR increased to 21.38 in 2023. That is not a minor fluctuation. That is a sector-level shift.

At the same time, other large sectors saw decreases that partially offset the overall rise. The Federal Public Service reported a decrease in disabling injuries from 2022 to 2023, and Postal Services and Longshoring also saw reductions.

So, when someone in your organization says "injuries are up federally," the practical response is not to panic. It is to ask a better question: "Which operational changes create this pattern?"

Air Transportation is a particularly good example because it reflects what many organizations experienced in 2023: demand and flight activity continued to return, staffing challenges persisted, and the system was under pressure. That combination produces very specific injury patterns, especially strains, slips, and material handling injuries in high throughput environments.

A story you have probably lived: the recovery surge that outpaced the safety reset. Picture a safety manager at a federally regulated aviation services contractor. Let's call her Nadia. In 2021, she fought to keep training running while schedules were unstable and crews were lean. In 2022, she focused on reintroducing audits and rebuilding the rhythm of inspections.

Then 2023 hits.

Flights increase. Turnaround windows get tighter. A wave of new hires comes in, some with industry experience, many without. Supervisors are stretched because the best leads are pulled into operations to keep up with volume. In theory, Nadia still has the same safety program. In practice, the day-to-day control environment has changed.

She starts hearing about minor strains, sore backs, and slips in wet conditions near service areas. Nothing seems catastrophic, but the pattern is there. Reporting is inconsistent, because new staff do not always recognize what counts as a reportable injury, and some supervisors are too busy to follow up properly. Nadia's team does a few toolbox sessions and sends a reminder about footwear and lifting technique.

Then a disabling injury occurs, and when the investigation starts, the uncomfortable truth comes out. The injury itself was preventable, but so was the system drift that led to it. It was not a lack of policy. It was a lack of capacity to enforce and coach during a surge.

When you look at a sector jump like the Air Transportation one in 2023, this is the kind of workplace reality hiding behind it. The federal report does not narrate Nadia's story for you, but the numbers line up with what organizations experience when tempo changes faster than supervision, training reinforcement, and hazard control.

Road Transportation: The Biggest Share, and A Different Kind of Risk

If Air Transportation is the 2023 spike story, Road Transportation is the baseline reality story. Road Transportation accounted for 36.2% of disabling injuries in federal jurisdiction in 2023, with 6,813 disabling injuries. It also had 35 fatal injuries reported that year. (Canada)

What stands out in the federal report is not just the raw count, but the disproportionality. Road Transportation's share of disabling injuries (36.2%) is far higher than its share of total hours worked (14.7%). That ratio is about 2.5 times.

That is what disproportionate risk looks like in numbers. Road Transportation risk is not one hazard. It is a layered system of hazards: vehicle incidents, fatigue, loading and unloading injuries, slips and falls on uneven surfaces, roadside exposures, time pressure, and increasingly complex employment relationships in the trucking ecosystem.

If you work with federally regulated carriers or contractors, none of this will surprise you. What the federal data does is remove the illusion that these are "isolated incidents." In aggregate, the sector remains the dominant source of disabling injuries and fatalities.

It is also worth noting that the federal government has been signaling increased enforcement focus in road transportation, including resourcing commitments tied to stronger compliance actions. A parliamentary written question referencing the Fall Economic Statement 2022 pointed to funding intended to support stronger action against non-compliant employers in the road transportation sector, including orders, fines, and prosecutions. (House of Commons of Canada)

From an OHS professional's perspective, that matters because enforcement focus and injury concentration tend to travel together. When the data keeps pointing to a sector, regulators eventually respond with targeted attention.

Federal Public Service: Fewer Disabling Injuries, but a Sharp Fatality Change

The Federal Public Service (including departments and Crown corporations) reported 3,218 disabling injuries in 2023, down from 2022, but fatal injuries increased to 14, up from 3 the year before. (Canada)

That kind of change raises questions immediately, because the public service is not a single work environment. It includes everything from office-based work to enforcement, inspections, fleet work, and field operations.

The point here is not to speculate about causes. The point is to treat this as a reminder: fatalities do not always correlate neatly with disabling injury counts. A workplace can improve on high-frequency injuries while still having exposure to low-frequency, high-consequence events.

That is exactly why many mature programs separate their prevention strategy into two tracks:

- Controls and coaching aimed at the high-frequency injuries that erode capacity and create recurring harm.
- Controls and verification aimed at fatality and serious injury (FSI) risk, where one failure can have irreversible consequences.

The federal dataset supports that approach because it shows these two worlds can move in different directions at the same time.

Air Transportation and Serious Outcomes: Injuries Surge While Fatalities Remain Lower than 2019

Another detail from the federal report is worth sitting with. Air Transportation disabling injuries in 2023 not only rose sharply from 2022, they surpassed pre-pandemic 2019 levels. Yet fatal injuries in Air Transportation were 7 in 2023, which is fewer than the 11 reported in 2019. (Canada)

That pattern can happen when operational tempo increases and drives more strains and "everyday" injuries, while high-consequence controls still hold reasonably well. It can also happen when serious hazards are well managed but basic injury prevention is lagging. Either way, it is a useful diagnostic.

If your organization is seeing a lot of ergonomic and slip/trip injuries while your high-consequence risk controls seem stable, the answer is not to relax. The answer is to treat the high-frequency injuries as a signal that supervision capacity, process control, or housekeeping standards may not be keeping pace with workload.

Now picture a different environment, closer to the fatality risk that shows up in Road Transportation.

A driver, experienced, reliable, no history of incidents, working for a contractor in a federally regulated supply chain. It is late. The schedule is tight. The weather is bad, but not extreme enough to trigger a shutdown. The driver pushes through because that is what the culture quietly rewards, even when the policy says, "Stop when unsafe."

The collision happens on a stretch of road that the organization has flagged in safety talks. The investigation later finds nothing dramatic: no alcohol, no reckless speeding, no wild violations. What it finds is a stack of small factors that the company tolerated for years: dispatch pressure, inconsistent fatigue management, weak enforcement of stop-work authority, and limited verification of hours and rest in a subcontracted environment.

When people talk about the "rise" in fatalities, they often imagine sensational negligence. In real life, many fatality pathways are built out of normalizing risk and relying on individual resilience to compensate for system weakness.

Federal data cannot show you that narrative directly, but when you see Road Transportation continuing to dominate fatalities, the prevention implication is obvious. The hazard is not rare. The hazard is operational.

Where "Frequency Rate" Helps, and Where it can Mislead

The federal report's DIFR moved slightly upward from 7.61 to 7.77 from 2022 to 2023, still below the 2019 rate of 9.39.

(Canada)

That is useful context, but it comes with two cautions. First, frequency rates can improve while serious injury risk stays the same, especially if organizations focus heavily on "easy wins" like minor injury reduction while failing to address high-consequence controls.

Second, rates can mask concentration. The overall federal DIFR is not the number you should be benchmarking against if you operate in Road Transportation, Air Transportation, or Postal Services. Your risk profile is not the federal average, and using the average as your comparison point can create false reassurance.

The federal report itself hints at this by showing that the share of disabling injuries in Road and Air Transportation is far greater than their share of hours worked. In other words, the average is not where the action is.

If you are an OHS professional, your real job is not to recite national figures. It is to translate them into decisions. The 2023 federal data points to three practical moves that are hard to argue with.

1. **Treat operational change as a hazard trigger, not a business milestone.**
   The Air Transportation increase is a textbook reminder that when hours worked rise, new hires surge, or workflow tightens, you need a safety reset plan that is as operational as the business plan. "Back to normal" needs to include refresher training, supervisor coaching time, verification activity, and deliberate attention to the first 90 days for new workers.
2. **Separate your "high frequency" injury strategy from your fatality risk strategy.**
   Road Transportation and the public service fatality pattern reinforce that fatalities do not behave like

strains and sprains. If your program does not have a clear fatality andserious injury prevention lens, your metrics may look fine right up until they do not.

3. **Document and investigate disabling injuries like you expect them to be read by someone outside your organization.**
   Federally regulated employersare required to submit written investigation reports for disabling injuries within 14 days, and serious injury reporting has a 24-hour requirement. That structure is not just administrative. It is a cue: investigations are part of your due diligence story. If your investigations read like blame documents, or if corrective actions are vague and unverified, your program will struggle to learn from the very incidents the system is designed to capture.

Regulatory Differences Table

Since many national employers operate across federal and provincial systems, the most practical "differences" are not philosophical. They are the reporting triggers and timelines that shape what gets investigated, who gets notified, and how quickly corrective action is expected.

Here is a streamlined comparison focused on what changes your operational response when a serious or disabling injury occurs.

Topic	**Federal jurisdiction (Canada Labour Code Part II and federal OHS guidance)**	**Provincial systems (general pattern across Canada)**
Definition focus	"Disabling injury" is defined in regulation and tied to inability to report or perform. regular duties after the day of injury ([Department of Justice Canada]).	Provinces generally use "lost time," "medical aid," and reportable incident categories through WCB regimes; definitions vary by province.

Topic	Federal jurisdiction (Canada Labour Code Part II and federal OHS guidance)	Provincial systems (general pattern across Canada)
Immediate reporting	Serious injuries must be reported to the Labour Program within 24 hours (Canada).	Employers typically must report serious incidents promptly to the provincial OHS regulator and to the WCB, but exact triggers and timelines vary.
Investigation report	Written investigation reports for temporary and permanent disabling injuries must be submitted within 14 days (Canada).	Provinces require investigations for certain incidents and may require submission upon request or for specific categories; requirements vary.
Compensation reporting	Separate from federal Labour Program reporting obligations.	Employers generally report to the WCB in their jurisdiction when an injury requires medical attention or leads to missed work or modified duties (CCOHS).

This is not meant to replace jurisdiction-specific compliance work. It is meant to reinforce a practical reality: if your organization sits in both worlds, you need incident response playbooks that reflect the strictest timelines and cleanest documentation standards, because "we did not realize which system applied" does not age well in investigations.

A Quick Word on Cases

When a fatality occurs, the difference between a regulatory response and something more serious often comes down to whether the organization's conduct looks like a reasonable safety effort that failed, or a pattern of preventable system weakness.

Even though the federal injury report is not a case law document, the broader enforcement environment matters. Federal jurisdiction employers can face significant penalties for OHS contraventions, including serious consequences where a contravention results in death or serious injury. ([Department of Justice Canada]())

And when fatalities are involved, the attention can expand beyond OHS enforcement into criminal scrutiny in exceptional cases. Canadian case law like Metron is often cited in safety circles for a reason: courts look past binders and into real practices, supervision, and whether unsafe shortcuts were normalized. ([Stringer LLP]())

The connection to injury data is simple: when the data shows concentrated risk in certain sectors year after year, the expectation of mature controls rises. "This is how the industry is" stops being a defense and starts sounding like an admission.

What 2023 Should Change in your 2026 Planning Cycle

If you are building a prevention plan for the coming year, the 2023 federal numbers should push you toward a more targeted conversation with leadership.

Not a generic "we need to improve safety," but something more grounded:

- If we operate in transportation, what are we doing that is different this year to address the reality that our sector carries disproportionate disabling injury and fatality risk?
- If our operations are ramping up, where is our "safety capacity plan" that matches the operational growth plan, especially around supervision ratios and onboarding quality?
- If we are seeing more ergonomic injuries, slips, and strains, what are the specific workflow conditions driving them, and what control changes are we willing to make rather than just retraining?

- If a disabling injury happens tomorrow, will our investigation report tell a clear story that we identified the hazard, controlled it as far as practicable, and verified that the fix worked?

The federal dataset is not telling you that workplaces suddenly became unsafe in 2023. It is telling you something more useful: risk moved, concentrated, and expressed itself in predictable places as work patterns shifted.

If you want one bottom-line takeaway for OHS professionals, it is this: the injury story in federal jurisdiction is not random. It is operational. If you match your prevention effort to where the operational risk is concentrated, you will get better outcomes than any broad "safety improvement" campaign ever delivers.

If you want, I can take the next step and turn these 2023 findings into a practical "top 10 prevention priorities" for federally regulated employers, written like a planning memo for senior leadership, with the same story-and-data approach.