

# MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS IN WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Today's cutting-edge technology allows cars to steer themselves, maintain safe following distances, brake automatically, and warn drivers of nearby vehicles. Yet, despite these safety improvements, motor vehicle accidents (MVAs) in the United States have generally been on the rise over the last several years.

This troubling trend is also impacting workers' compensation (WC). Though there has been an overall decline in WC claims, the frequency of claims for MVAs has increased in recent years. These accidents can be very severe and are responsible for a significant portion of fatal WC claims.

So, what might explain this dangerous trend? A striking similarity in the growth and popularity of cellphone, and particularly smartphone, use over the same time period suggests that distracted driving may be a factor.

This NCCI Research Brief, "Motor Vehicle Accidents in Workers' Compensation," takes a deeper look at these issues and examines recent trends in the frequency and severity of MVA lost-time claims for all NCCI states combined. The study also looks at the classes most involved in this trend and factors affecting MVA frequency.



The frequency of claims from MVAs increased, while the frequency of all claims decreased from 2011 to 2016.



The rapid expansion of smartphone ownership since 2011 may have been a factor in the rise of MVA frequency.



Over the last five years, more than 40% of WC fatal claims involved an MVA.

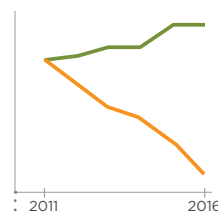


MVA frequency increases from 2011 to 2016 occurred in the majority of classes where MVAs are most common (e.g., trucks, taxis, salespersons).



MVA claims cost 80% to 100% more than the average claim because they involve severe injuries (e.g., head, neck, multiple injuries).

MVA CLAIMS  
ALL CLAIMS



Among the major findings in the report:



**The frequency of claims from MVAs increased, while the frequency of all claims decreased from 2011 to 2016.**

Workers' compensation has experienced a long-term decline in overall claim frequency, thanks to automation, robotics and continued advances in workplace safety. However, for WC MVA claims, the story is quite different, with frequency declining for many years and then suddenly turning upward. From 2000 to 2011, both overall claims and MVA claims were decreasing, but a noticeable divergence occurred in 2011. From 2011 to 2016, the frequency of all claims declined by 17.6%, while the frequency of MVA claims increased by 5.0%.



**MVA frequency increases from 2011 to 2016 occurred in the classes where MVAs are most common.**

As expected, certain classifications, which are predominantly based on the use of motor vehicles, such as truckers, taxi drivers and salespersons, generate the majority of MVA claims.



**The rapid expansion of smartphone ownership since 2011 may have been a factor in the rise in MVA frequency.**

A wide variety of external factors may contribute to MVAs. However, it is striking how the increasing popularity and use of smartphones coincides with this growing trend of MVAs. By the end of 2010, approximately 27% of all cellphones were smartphones. But by the end of 2016, that figure had tripled to 81%.

According to a publication by the National Safety Council, a minimum of 27% of crashes involve drivers talking and texting on cellphones. However, the report also states that "there is strong evidence to support

that underreporting of driver cellphone use in crashes is resulting in a substantial underestimation of the magnitude of the public safety threat."



**MVA claims cost 80% to 100% more than the average claim because they involve severe injuries (e.g., head, neck, multiple injuries).**

MVA claims tend to represent a higher share of the costliest claims. Over a five-year period, MVA claims accounted for 28% of claims above \$500,000, versus just 5% of all claims.



**Over the last five years, more than 40% of fatal WC claims involved an MVA.**

An MVA claim is 12 times more likely to result in a fatality than a non-MVA claim.



**So what steps are being taken to address the rising number of MVAs occurring in the United States?**

Several efforts are already underway to discourage distracted driving:

- Cellphone blocking through smartphone apps that prohibit calls or texts while a vehicle is in motion.
- Several states have implemented bans on cellphone use and/or text messaging.
- Self-driving autonomous vehicles are already being tested in various cities and states across the country.

Will these efforts to reduce distracted driving be successful? What other solutions might the future hold? NCCI will continue to closely monitor trends in MVAs and share our findings.

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