

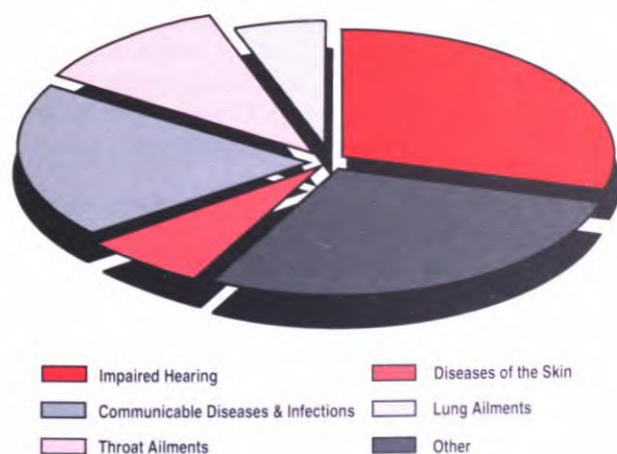
## Workplace Safety

It is estimated that some 1.3 to 1.5 million Poles work in unhealthy or unsafe conditions (see Figure 9.4). During the first three quarters of 1991, 82,123 people suffered work-related accidents, of which 526 were fatal and 3,602 resulted in permanent injury. Significant improvements in the short term appear unlikely, because Polish industry lacks the capital to invest in workplace health and safety. Nevertheless, the Government has adopted a number of workplace health and safety regulations:

- each enterprise must maintain a health and safety unit;
- workplace hazards must be identified and assessed;
- workers must be provided with medical examinations;
- workers must be informed of the risks associated with a given job;
- workers must be issued with appropriate safety equipment; and
- students are prohibited from performing certain dangerous tasks.

The Minister of Labour and Social Welfare has published a set of standards defining the maximum allowable exposure to harmful chemicals and emissions. In addition, the Minister regularly reviews the levels of compensation for work-related injuries.

**Figure 9.4**  
**Work-related Illnesses**  
(percent)



Source: Raport o Stanie Państwa, 1991

## Strikes

Despite a remarkable 40% drop in the standard of living between 1989 and 1990, there was initially little popular support for strikes and walkouts as an avenue of protest. The number of strikes and strikers in 1990 was one third that in 1989. Statistics for the first half of 1990 recorded only 87 strikes in which a total of 24,500 people participated. Only about a quarter of the workers in enterprises affected by unrest actually participated in the strikes.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the recession has hit Poland's workers hard. Recently, railway employees in northern Poland staged an unsuccessful strike for higher wages. A vocal contingent of Poland's 2.5 million farmers launched a protest, demanding protection against rising capital costs which far outstrip the prices they receive for their produce. Silesian miners walked off their jobs to protest the abolition of wage subsidies which had been rendered unsustainable by low production. And workers in factories threatened by closure regularly stage protests and sit-ins in attempts to save their jobs or improve their incomes.

Most of the recent strikes in Poland have occurred against a backdrop of poor financial conditions in the enterprises where the strikes occurred. The Government's own assessment is that, given the current recessionary situation, these and similar causes will continue to provoke strike action. In the first three quarters of 1991, some 188,900 workers participated in strikes, although these actions produced only a modest loss of working time - about 478,200 working days, an average of 2.5 days per worker. This figure is somewhat lower than the average for 1990, and suggests that most stoppages were of relatively short duration and were intended as "warning strikes." Many strikes in 1991 represented worker efforts to secure guarantees that their enterprises would continue operating.

A new law on trade unions and the resolution of industrial disputes became effective in 1991. It provides for negotiation and mediation in the resolution of industrial disputes. Tripartite discussions are underway to establish accepted rules of conduct during such disputes. Efforts are also being made to create an institution that would select and train professional industrial mediators, and finance their endeavours.