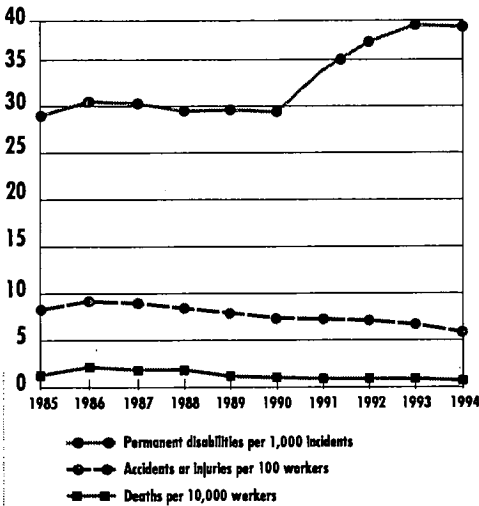


## INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENT AND INJURY RATES



Source: *Coordinación de Salud en el Trabajo*, Coordination Committee for Health in the Workplace, 1995.

Worker health and safety is regulated under the Mexican constitution and under the *Ley Federal del Trabajo*, Federal Labour Law. Article 123 of the constitution places an onus on employers to protect the health and safety of workers. Chapter 9 of the labour law sets out a number of specific requirements and also gives force to regulations called *Reglamento General de Seguridad e Higiene en el Trabajo*, general regulations on security and hygiene in the workplace. The law requires the establishment of joint worker/employer/government committees in each workplace with 20 or more workers. The committees, known as *comisiones de seguridad e higiene*, are comparable in many ways to Ontario's Joint Health and Safety Committees. They are expected to ensure that the law is complied with and that workers properly use personal protective equipment. The *Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (STPS)*, Secretariat of Labour and Social Welfare, has overall responsibility for administration of the law.

The government has programs in place to support the activities of health and safety committees. In particular, the *Dirección General de Seguridad e Higiene en el Trabajo*, Safety and Hygiene Division of the *STPS*, operates a program called *Programa de Consolidación Operativa para Comisiones de Seguridad e Higiene en el Trabajo*, Program to Consolidate the Operations of the Health and Safety Commissions. This is a two-phase program. A 25-hour workshop trains committee members to carry out their duties. Then there is a follow-up phase, which provides continuous advice by tracking the quarterly meetings of the committee.

Notwithstanding the activities of these joint committees, most observers agree that government regulation is the principal force driving the market. Mexican unions have not been nearly as aggressive as their Canadian counterparts in pursuing health and safety objectives. Although notoriously lax, enforcement has been stepped up in recent years. The implementation of the Agreement for Labor Cooperation (NAALC), under the NAFTA labour "side agreement" has also had an important impact.

In spite of an increased emphasis on enforcement, the devaluation of the peso has put the government in a position where rigorous enforcement could lead to job losses. As a result, enforcement efforts have been focused mainly on larger firms, especially those with export earnings. Government officials say that recent budget cuts allowed the inspection of only 5 percent of Mexico's 670,000 registered companies in 1995.

Engineering controls for health and safety hazards are a relatively new concept in Mexico, and the emphasis is still on personal protective equipment for workers. The regulations include detailed requirements for a wide variety of protective clothing and equipment. In the past, many companies have tried to avoid the expense of safety equipment, and worker reluctance to use such equipment has