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Study finds new hires most at risk of workplace death, injury

■ Training, culture of safety key to reducing incidents.

By Mella McEwen
Oil Editor

Permian Basin oil and gas companies in all phases of the industry have been on a hiring binge, striving to meet demand.

Despite the advances in technology used in oil and gas production, the work continues to carry risks. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration reports that in its Region VI, which consists of Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico and Oklahoma, there were 39 oil field-related fatalities in Fiscal Year 2010 and in Fiscal Year 2011, 29 fatalities through Aug. 5.

The Texas Oil and Gas Association, in collaboration with Texas Mutual Insurance and the Oil and Gas Safety Round-

table, looked into the risks for what are known as short-service employees.

Short service employees, explained John Stephens, "can be newly hired employees or employees new to the work site. They can have 20 years experience but be new to a site."

Stephens, who retired in 2002 as director of safety, health and environment for ConocoPhillips, serves as president of the Greater Houston STEPS Network as well as chairs the Oil and Gas Safety Roundtable and TXOGA's Safety Committee. He said the research looked at fatalities and catastrophic injuries — injuries resulting in insurance claims of \$100,000 or more from 2001 to 2010.

"What we found, to me, was shocking," he said. "A pattern emerged that I call the one-third-two-third, where a third of all fatalities occurred within the first three months of being hired and two-thirds occur within the first year of being hired. That's devastating and appalling."

Topping the list of causes, he said was struck-by injuries, followed by motor vehicle accidents and being caught in, under or between machinery. New employees most at risk, he said, are floor hands, roustabouts and laborers who have

