

# [Why Deregulation May Be Especially Bad for Women](#)



## **Why Deregulation May Be Especially Bad for Women**

**By Jane Lawrence Sumner | April 4, 2017**

The Republican party has traditionally sought to reduce regulation on business, and the Trump administration has made such reductions a priority. De-regulation features prominently in its recent budget plan ("[America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again](#)": as a way to save money and restore America's greatness. By burdening businesses, the document explains, regulations "function much like taxes that unnecessarily inhibit growth and employment" (p. 9).

Thus, the administration has outlined three actions: a federal-level, 60-day "regulatory freeze" on the creation of new rules; the creation of bodies within each federal agency to carry out the new regulatory priorities; and a new requirement that all federal agencies cut two existing regulations for each new one issued.

This [Executive Order](#) "konmari" or housecleaning includes a regulatory cost cap of \$0 for 2017—any new regulation must be, effectively, costless.

To many, this approach sounds fantastic. Removing regulations on businesses, it is hoped, will relieve

employers of the costs of regulatory compliance and allow them to create more jobs, thus improving the economy. But here's the catch: many regulations exist to protect **people** – consumers, employees, and average citizens.

Although it is difficult at this point to predict which regulations are likely to be culled, it seems reasonable that if the “one regulation forward, two regulations back” approach holds, many of the regulations that are discarded are likely to be from OSHA.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), part of the United States Department of Labor, is responsible for enacting many of the regulations related to work. Created by the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, [OSHA](#) is charged with assuring “safe and healthful working conditions for working men and women by setting and enforcing standards.”

OSHA is a likely target for “regulation fishing” for three reasons. First, OSHA exists almost solely to set and enforce standards and regulations. The sheer number of regulations involved in its operation makes the agency a target. Second, OSHA rules constrain businesses, and the cost of business would likely be lower without many OSHA rules. Third, OSHA is not a hugely prominent body in the public consciousness (unlike, for instance, the EPA), and many of OSHA's individual regulations are so mundane or limited in scope that a widespread public backlash is unlikely to ensue if its rules are cut.

If OSHA rules are discarded, this will hurt workers of all genders, but in starkly different ways. Data, for instance, suggest men and women suffer differentially in workplace accidents.

According to OSHA's workplace [fatality data](#), there were 1,268 workplace fatalities in fiscal year 2015. Trucks, ladders, collisions, roofs, vehicles, forklifts, and trees were especially deadly, collectively accounting about half of these deaths (624). Only 7% (36) of these are identifiable as women. Changing regulations with regard to industries like construction could, thus, have a very severe effect on men, who are far more likely than women to die on the job.

Yet, gratefully, not all workplace injuries are fatalities. In the same year, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports [902,160 non-fatal occupational injuries](#). Though men accounted for just about 62% of these non-fatal injuries in private industry, certain categories of injury appear distinctly gendered. Men, for example, represent far more of the nonfatal workplace injuries associated with dangerous jobs: 91% of nonfatal workplace injuries that result in amputations, 93% of injuries involving trucks, 92% of injuries involving fires or explosions, and 80% of injuries involving getting caught in equipment affected men.

On the other hand, we can identify two categories of workplace injury that distinctly affect women: those related to repetitive work or office work and those involving being injured by another person while on the job.

First, women account for 60% of injuries caused by “repetitive motion, involving microtasks”, 66% of incidents of carpal tunnel syndrome, and 62% of reported tendonitis. Regulations regarding office work and other repetitive motion are distinctly un-sexy, un-prominent rules that are easily presented as unnecessarily burdensome to companies, but dispensing with them would harm female employees disproportionately.

Second, women are far, far more likely than men to be hurt by other people while on the job. In 2015, women

accounted for 68% of “intentional injury by another person” and 70% of injuries caused by “injury by person unintentional or intent unknown”, as well as 62% of those caused by “violence and other injuries by persons or animal” while on the job (“animal and insect related incidents” are a separate, fairly gender-balanced category of injury). [Violence against women at work](#) is a [known issue](#), but one that still receives less attention that it deserves. In addition to explicit violence, women are likely to be hurt by others because of the jobs they have. Specifically, women account for 81% of injuries in health care and social assistance and 60% in education services.

Nursing assistants are [injured more often](#) than workers in any other occupation, according to the BLS, and nursing assistants are primarily women.

Framing regulations as easily dispensed impediments to business—and repeating that rhetoric loudly and often—makes it easy for the public to believe all regulations are drains on the economy. Yet many were created to protect *people*. Just as we don’t know precisely how well existing regulations work to protect those workers, we cannot know how many additional workplace fatalities or injuries would occur in the absence of current regulations that currently exist. We can only say that their removal would not improve workers’ conditions. Moreover, removing or loosening many of these regulations could easily represent a very gendered policy: men are more likely to be killed at work and more likely to be injured while doing dangerous work, but women suffer much more from routine-use injuries, workplace violence, and other interactions with people. Since these issues are less obviously dangerous, they may be more susceptible to cuts. The de-regulation of workplace safety is very much a women’s rights issue.

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