Opioids In Construction

DRUG ADDICTION AND OPIOIDS ARE RAVAGING AMERICA: Hundreds of thousands of Americans have lost their lives to drug abuse, and it will only get worse unless action is taken.¹

- **2015**- there were 52,404 drug overdose deaths
- **2016**- two million Americans had an addiction to prescription or illicit opioids
- **2016**- over 63,000 families lost loved ones to an overdose²
- **2017**- seven in 10 companies report being directly impacted by prescription drug misuse³

A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY: President Donald J. Trump is mobilizing his entire Administration to address drug addiction and opioid abuse by directing the declaration of a Nationwide Public Health Emergency to address the opioids crisis.

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION IS FIGHTING BACK: The Trump White House has moved quickly to address the drug addiction and opioid crisis, with the President’s Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis leading the way.

- In March 2017, President Trump established the President’s Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis, with the following stated mission: “to study the scope and effectiveness of the Federal response to drug addiction and the opioid crisis and to make recommendations to the President for improving that response.”

The opioid crisis: The construction industry’s simmering threat⁴

- Construction workers are among the most susceptible to opioid abuse, second only to food service industry employees. Business insurance agent CNA estimates 15.1% of construction workers have used legal or illegal drugs illicitly.
- A construction company that employs 100 people and happens to be in a state that is particularly hard hit by opioid use can expect to spend an average of nearly $41,000 extra per year due to opioid addiction.⁵
- Labor force participation among prime-age workers 25–54 is more likely to be lower in areas with high opioid prescribing rates; this age group has been hardest hit by the opioid epidemic⁶

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- The average lost-time workers’ compensation claims for workers using opioid painkillers can total as much as $117,000, which is 900% higher than the cost for workers who do not take opioid painkillers.⁷

Why Construction?

1. Aged workforce and fewer younger workers entering construction
2. Drug testing, especially random, can be complicated to manage
3. Fragmentation of testing protocols (contractors, subs, union and nonunion)
4. Lack of drug rehabilitation programs processes and policies by contractors
5. Construction workers, by the physical nature of their jobs, often suffer the wear and tear on the body that, in recent history, would have led doctors to prescribe opioid pain medication to allow them to return to the work site.⁸

What are the safety concerns?

1. Hazards affect the employee, co-workers and the public
2. Material and equipment damage
3. Close camaraderie among co-workers and colleagues therefore, they do not report
4. Employers are reconsidering zero-tolerance policies⁹
5. The employer could face serious liability issues if someone is injured on the job site through negligence on their part from allowing an “impaired” worker to remain on the job site.¹⁰

What can be done?

1. Be proactive and speak up. A recent Bisnow report in Forbes on opioid abuse in construction noted the reluctance of companies to talk about the problem.¹¹
2. Consider implementing treatment and recovery programs for employees and immediate family members
   a. Work with community resources ensuring employees have “access to high quality evidence based treatment and recovery programs”³
   b. Educate employees on addiction and substance abuse and alternative treatment plans
3. Employers can also embrace their role as a key player in efforts to prevent future opioid abuses and addiction.³

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⁹ Statement of Corwin Rhyan on “The Opioids Epidemic: Implications for America’s Workplaces” U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions & Subcommittee on Workforce Protections February 15, 2018
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4. Review your substance abuse testing protocol. It’s a common assumption that a 10-panel drug test would pick up more drugs than a five-panel one, says Dawn Standerwick, vice president of strategic growth at Employment Screening Resources, or ESR, a pre-employment screening and employee background check company based in Novato, California. Unfortunately, the 10-panel tests for some drugs that are no longer commonly used, such as Quaaludes. For firms wanting to test for synthetic opioids instead, Standerwick advised asking for a five-panel test with expanded opiates.12

5. Despite this widespread, costly issue, NSC’s survey found that only 24 percent of companies provide training or education to employees on opioid use. “Training was the single most underutilized thing a company could do to address substance abuse in their workforce,” according to Tess Benham, senior program manager of prescription drug overdose initiatives at the National Safety Council.13

6. Joel Bennett, president and founder of Organizational Wellness and Learning Systems Inc., a Fort Worth, Texas-based consulting and training service focused on well-being in the workplace said that the employer needs to actively promote Employee Assistance Programs (EAP’s), which can provide professional counseling.14