

Tools for Life – Weekly Health & Safety Meeting



Home Healthy - Home Safe

September 2021

Substance Abuse

SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE | 1-800-273-8255

CRISIS TEXT LINE | TEXT HOME TO 741741

Substance abuse, including alcohol, is a common problem in the construction industry and can lead to mental health problems and even suicide. Worksite alcohol and drug use cannot be taken lightly especially in construction where we rely on each other for safety. Substance abuse can take place in many forms and can exist without obvious clues. Addictive substances are also more easily obtained in recent years - think about all the prescription medicines available to the families of people who suffer occupational injuries. More recently, opioid abuse has reached epidemic levels in certain areas of the country.

Construction work can result in painful injuries that are sometimes treated with prescription opioids. One in four people prescribed opioids for long-term pain become addicted and opioid-related deaths are on the rise.

Substance abuse is a major contributor to suicides in the construction industry, as workers who are injured on the job rely more and more on prescription painkillers to deal with their particular situations. Occupational injuries which lead to days off from work can cause stress and depression over loss/reduction of income and the family problems which arise as a result. Prescription medicines or other addictive substances are sometimes sought as the way to relieve the feelings of sadness we might feel under these circumstances. According to the CDC, approximately 22 percent of deaths by suicide involved alcohol intoxication, with a blood-alcohol content at or above the legal limit. Opiates (including heroin and prescription painkillers) were present in 20 percent of suicide deaths, marijuana in 10.2 percent, cocaine in 4.6 percent, and amphetamines in 3.4 percent. One of the reasons alcohol and/or drug misuse significantly affects suicide rates is the lack of inhibition that occurs when a person is intoxicated. A review of available information reveals that a diagnosis of alcohol misuse or dependence is associated with a suicide risk that is 10 times greater than the suicide risk in the general population, and individuals who inject drugs are at about 14 times greater risk for suicide.

What can I do? Occupational injuries are largely avoidable. Look around your workplace – if you see something, get it fixed or report it to your supervisor immediately, don't wait. An injury on the job must be reported right away and attended to by medical personnel. Prompt action can limit the extent of the injury and the length of time/type of treatment necessary.

HEALTH OR SAFETY REMINDER: Report hazards to your supervisor or foreman to prevent injuries. If you're injured, opioids are the last option. Talk to your doctor about non-addictive medications or other options to treat the pain.

Discussion Points / Question:

1. What addictive substances are easily available in your household?
2. Who in the house has access to prescription medications?
3. Are prescription medicines/other addictive substances being used or abused by someone you know? What can you do about this?