

HAZARD ALERT

CPWR
THE CENTER FOR CONSTRUCTION
RESEARCH AND TRAINING

OPIOID DEATHS IN CONSTRUCTION



Why Are Construction Workers at Risk?

- ▶ The construction industry has one of the highest injury rates compared to other industries.
- ▶ Opioids are often prescribed to treat the pain caused by these injuries.
- ▶ Long-term opioid use can make people more sensitive to pain and decrease the opioid's pain-reducing effects.



According to the CDC, 1 out of 4 people prescribed opioids for long-term pain become addicted.

Injured Construction Workers Often...

- ▶ Cannot continue to work while injured.
- ▶ Suffer a loss in income. Even if an injured worker receives workers' compensation, it is often not enough to make up for lost pay.
- ▶ Experience anxiety, stress, and depression, which can add to the pain and are additional risk factors for addiction.



Overdose Deaths Are On the Rise.

- ▶ In 2020 alone, there were more than 93,000 overdose deaths in the U.S.—**nearly 75% of which involved an opioid.**¹ Opioid-related overdose deaths **increased 36.7%** over 2019.²
- ▶ These increases were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic because of isolation, loss of loved ones, stress, unemployment, precarious housing, decreased access to treatment services, and more.³
- ▶ Construction workers are significantly more likely to die from an opioid overdose than the average worker — studies in both Ohio and Massachusetts, for example, showed they were seven times more likely.^{4,5}
- ▶ Additionally, a past study has shown that more than half of those who died from an overdose had suffered at least one job-related injury.⁶

Protect Yourself!

1 Prevent Injuries

Work shouldn't hurt. Your employer should be committed to a safe job site, and you should use safe practices. Together these reduce the risk of injuries and therefore the need for pain medication.



Getting help lifting heavy materials can reduce the risk for injury.

2 Talk to a Doctor

Opioids are addictive and can have side effects.

Ask about:

- ▶ Other forms of pain medication that are not addictive and have fewer side effects.
- ▶ Other forms of pain management such as physical therapy or acupuncture.



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Opioids should be the last option to treat your pain. If opioids are prescribed they should be used for the shortest possible time. Safely dispose of any unused medications.

3 Get Help

Opioids change how your brain works, triggering one part of it to demand more opioids and changing another part of it so it's harder to resist.⁷ Check with your union or employer to find out if they have a program to help, such as:

- ▶ An employee assistance program (EAP); or
- ▶ Member assistance program (MAP).

If you're having trouble stopping using opioids, check with your union or your doctor for help to find the best addiction treatment option for you.

Remember addiction is an illness that can be treated.

Call this confidential national hotline:

1-800-662-HELP (4357)

If you or someone you know needs help:

- ▶ Contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration at <https://www.samhsa.gov> or call their confidential national hotline: **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**.
- ▶ Visit the Recovery Resource online hub: <https://www.recoveryresourcehub.org>.
- ▶ Contact your union.
- ▶ Find a list of common opioids at: <https://bit.ly/common-opioids>.
- ▶ Give your doctor the Physicians' Alert on Pain Management among Construction Workers from <https://bit.ly/physicians-alerts>.

Find out more about construction hazards.

To receive copies of this Hazard Alert and cards on other topics:

call 301-578-8500

email cpwr-r2p@cpwr.com

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Sources: 1) Ahmad FB, Fossen LM, Sutton P. Provisional drug overdose death counts. National Center for Health Statistics. 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/asn/drug-overdose-data.htm>. 2) Drug Overdose Deaths in the U.S. Up 30% in 2020. CDC/National Center for Health Statistics. 2021. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2021/20210714.htm. 3) Bernstein L, Achenbach J. 2021. July 14. Drug overdose deaths soared to a record 93,000 last year. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/07/14/drug-overdoses-pandemic-2020/>. 4) Dissell, Rachel. 2017. Nov 5. Opioid Overdose Deaths - Which jobs are at risk? The Plain Dealer. <https://www.cleveland.com/metro/2017/11/opioid-overdose-deaths-which-jobs.html>. 5) Hawkins D, Rebofs C, Laing J, Davis L. Opioid-related overdose deaths by industry and occupation - Massachusetts, 2011-2015. Am J Ind Med. Published online July 26, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajim.23029>. 6) Cheng et al. Comparison of Opioid-Related Deaths by Work-Related Injury. American Journal of Industrial Medicine 56:308-316. 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajim.22138>.