

HAZARD ALERT



OPIOID DEATHS IN CONSTRUCTION



Why are construction workers at risk?

- ▶ The construction industry has one of the highest injury rates of any industry.¹
- ▶ Even for minor injuries, a worker's risk of death increases when opioids are prescribed.²
- ▶ The probability of long-term opioid use increases sharply in the first days a worker starts taking them, even when the prescription is only for five days.³

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 existing pain.



SOURCE: 1) THE BUREAU OF LABORERS' COMPENSATION; 2) FREEMAN A, DAVIS KG, YING J, LANG DA, HUTH JR, LIU P. Workers' compensation prescription medication patterns and associated out-comes. Am J Ind Med. 2022 Jan;65(1):51-58. doi: 10.1002/ajim.23306. Epub 2021 Nov 2. PMID: 34727383. 3) Shah A, Hayes CJ, Martin BC. Characteristics of Initial Prescription Episodes and Likelihood of Long-Term Opioid Use — United States, 2006–2015. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2017;66:265–269. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6610a1.4> Ahmad FB, Cisewski JA, Rossen LM, Sutton P. Provisional drug overdose death counts: National Center for Health Statistics. 2022. 5) 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/>. 6) Cheng et al. Comparison of Opioid-Related Deaths by Work-Related Injury. American Journal of Industrial Medicine 55:308-316. 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajim.22138>.

Overdose deaths are on the rise

- ▶ There were more than **107,000** overdose deaths in 2021 — over **80,000** of which were due to an opioid overdose. Deaths from opioid overdose increased **15%** from 2020 to 2021.⁴
- ▶ **COVID-19** increased fatal overdoses because the pandemic led to more isolation, loss of loved ones, stress, unemployment, precarious housing, decreased access to treatment services, and other factors.⁵
- ▶ One study found that **more than half** of those who died from an overdose had suffered at least one job-related injury.⁶

7X Construction workers are seven times more likely to die from an opioid overdose than other workers.⁶

PROTECT YOURSELF!

1 Prevent Injuries

Work shouldn't hurt—your employer must provide a safe workplace to prevent an injury from occurring. A commitment to safety reduces the need for pain medication.

Follow safe work practices.



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.

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

3 Get Help

Opioids change how your brain works. They trigger one part of it to demand more opioids and make it harder for another part of it to resist them.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).

Or ask your doctor for help to find the best addiction treatment option for you.

Remember addiction is an illness that can be treated.

Source: National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens. Out of Control: Opioids and the Brain. 2018. <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/out-control-opioids-and-brain>

If you or someone you know needs help:

- ▶ Contact the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Hotline at <https://www.samhsa.gov/> or call their confidential hotline: **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**.
- ▶ Visit the Recovery Resource online hub: <https://www.recoveryresourcehub.org/prescription-medica>
- ▶ 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



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Sources: 1) CPWR. The Construction Chart Book. 2018. Chart 38e. 2) Freeman A, Davis KG, Ying J, Lang DA, Huth JR, Liu P. Workers' compensation prescription medication patterns and associated out-comes. Am J Ind Med. 2022 Jan;65(1):51-58. doi: 10.1002/ajim.23306. Epub 2021 Nov 2. PMID: 34727383. 3) Shah A, Hayes CJ, Martin BC. Characteristics of Initial Prescription Episodes and Likelihood of Long-Term Opioid Use — United States, 2006–2015. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2017;66:265–269. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6610a1.4> Ahmad FB, Cisewski JA, Rossen LM, Sutton P. Provisional drug overdose death counts: National Center for Health Statistics. 2022. 5) 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/>. 6) Cheng et al. Comparison of Opioid-Related Deaths by Work-Related Injury. American Journal of Industrial Medicine 55:308-316. 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajim.22138>.