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GOOD NEWS

The Trades Embrace Getting the Word Out about Mental Health

Two years ago, Brandon Anderson of the Associated General Contractors of Missouri (AGCMO) stood up at the [Workshop on Combating Suicide and Overdose Fatalities](#) and shared the new “Hope Coins” his organization had created to promote the 988 suicide hotline. Since then, many other organizations -- including The Association of Union Constructors (TAUC), National Electrical Contractors Association, Mechanical Contractors Association of America, Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors’ National Association, Laborers’ Health and Safety Fund of North America, and the Ironworkers Union -- have created their own coins to promote mental health in several ways, such as 988, EAPs, substance use help, and normalizing help-seeking behavior. Additionally, the types of mental health promotion collateral have started to expand. Not only have t-shirts, stickers, safety vests and the like have been produced with the 988 logo, but the New York Laborers Health and Safety Trust Fund put their [Hope Lives](#) logo on coffee cups and distributed them (along with bagels) at work sites and union halls.

CPWR spoke with Alex Kopp of TAUC, who said that he jumped on the bandwagon. There were two deaths due to suicide that weighed heavily on him. “We need to do something,” he remembers saying. “I think we can make a difference.” TAUC started with plastic chips with 988 on them and then produced hard hat stickers. Between the two they’ve handed out over 80,000 units. Kopp says contractors soon started reaching out asking if they could make their own. “We’re trying to spread the message and get rid of the ‘tough man’ mentality. If something is on your mind, go talk to someone. If someone is on your mind, don’t wait to reach out.”

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Project Manager, MATES in Construction

MATES in Construction, a leading Australian suicide prevention program, is hiring a project manager for its new North American pilot project, which will adapt and implement their successful model within the construction and energy sectors. The [Project Manager](#) will lead the establishment and execution of this pilot program, fostering a coalition of industry stakeholders to ensure its sustainability and effectiveness. Please click the link above to see a full description of the position and apply by sending an email to: recruitment_us@mates.org.au.

FREE RESOURCE FROM CPWR

Pain Management for Construction Workers Physicians' Alert

The [Pain Management for Construction Workers Physicians' Alert](#) helps facilitate a conversation between workers and their medical providers about avoiding opioid prescriptions when possible. It provides questions that workers can ask before accepting an opioid prescription, including whether the condition can be treated effectively without opioids, and how opioids may interact with other medications the worker is taking. Additionally, it explains to providers how using opioids to manage construction workers' pain has resulted in high rates of addiction and overdose, that workers have little or no sick leave, and what other cultural considerations and work practices may leave workers vulnerable to addiction and overdose. Please consider distributing this resource to help workers protect themselves and find alternative methods of treatment for pain and injury.

RESEARCH CORNER

New Study on Suicide Demographics

Researchers have conducted limited studies examining the underlying characteristics of those in the construction industry who die by suicide. To begin to address this gap, CPWR staff published an article examining these characteristics. The paper will appear in a special issue in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* focusing on the construction sector to be published early next year.

The researchers found that in 2021 nearly 18% of suicides among those aged 16-64 with a reported industry were employed in construction. The suicide rate among males in construction was 68% higher than in all industries (50.5 versus

30.0 per 100,000 workers), and the rate was 28% higher among females in construction than in all industries (9.4 versus 7.6 per 100,000). Male iron and steel workers had a 133% higher suicide rate compared to all male construction workers, with a rate of 117.9 per 100,000 workers.

These disproportionately high death rates highlight the need for continued research into the underlying causes of suicide among construction workers, including examination of work environment alongside other work-related factors. The [abstract](#) of the article is available on the AJIM website and you can find [key findings](#) on CPWR's website.

SPOTLIGHT ON PREVENTION

Fatigue Management

Studies of the impacts of long work hours, excess consecutive days of work, and irregular shifts are clear: Workers are less productive and at greater risk of both physical injuries and mental health problems, including suicide. Working long days or nights, as well as working day after day without a break, prevents the necessary physical and mental “reset” that is a core component of psychological resilience in the face of work demand and stress. Excessive work hours are also a leading cause of family conflict.

Contractors can take a major step toward preventing poor mental health on worksites by implementing “fatigue management” programs. Rob Dahl, CSP, ARM Sr. Safety & Risk Consultant for construction industry advisors Holmes Murphy, promotes fatigue management as an effective way to address mental health challenges on worksites, as well to improve safety, productivity and quality, and to reduce absenteeism. The cornerstone of these programs is monitoring hours of work and requiring senior management to sign off for every worker scheduled for more than 50 hours of work a week. Additionally, employers with fatigue management programs find ways to schedule all workers for a full weekend off at least once a month. These programs are complemented by monitoring for signs of fatigue among the workforce and assessing fatigue as a contributing factor to near misses, mistakes, and incidents. Workers are also trained in the importance of adequate rest and management's commitment to a healthy work culture. For more information, watch Rob's presentation on [Managing Fatigue in Construction](#) and check out the National Safety Council's [Fatigue Risk Management Program Manual Template for Construction](#).

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