

Opioid Crisis Disproportionately Affects Construction Industry: Three Policies to Minimize Associated Risks

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In October 2017, the White House declared the opioid addiction epidemic to be a “public health crisis.” Not surprisingly, according to an October 2017 article by Construction Dive, this crisis disproportionately affects the construction industry more than any other sector.

With an aging workforce in a physically demanding industry, construction workers turn to prescription medications to treat pains from years of physical labor. In fact, in 2016, construction workers in Ohio were 7.2 times more likely than workers in other industries to die from opioid-related overdoses, according to *The Plain Dealer*, an Ohio news publication.

Employers in the construction industry, therefore, should consider taking extra precautions to protect themselves, their employees, and the public from the potentially catastrophic effects of this crisis. Policies and procedures that an employer in the construction industry should consider include:

- Implementing drug screenings during the hiring process. This will help identify and eliminate individuals who may have already fallen victim to opioid abuse.
- Implementing “random” drug testing during employment. This will put employees on notice of the employer’s policies and procedures of random drug testing and further aid in preventing drug use. Employers also can execute “reasonable suspicion” drug tests, which should be performed after consulting with counsel.
- Implementing written disciplinary policies and procedures for disciplining employees that test positive for any opioids or illegal drugs.

This crisis will not be eliminated in short order. Employers, especially those in the construction industry, should take steps to minimize associated risks.

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