

Construction Safety: Opioid Crisis

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When the White House declared the country in an opioid-addiction crisis back in October 2017, it was not news to the construction industry.

Job site hazards and strenuous activity mean that pain disproportionately afflicts construction workers, making them more susceptible to substance abuse, says the Itasca, Illinois-based National Safety Council (NSC). Even when used properly, side effects of opioids can include impairments such as sedation and dizziness, which are not conducive to maintaining safe job sites. The result is increased safety risks.

Further, the current labor shortage in the construction industry is expected to last another three years. A construction report by USG Corporation and U.S. Chamber of Commerce found decreases in worker and job site safety can name addiction and substance abuse issues as contributing factors. Almost 40 percent of contractors say they are highly concerned about the effects use of and addictions to opioids (followed by alcohol and marijuana, at 27 percent and 22 percent of contractors, respectively) have on worker safety.

Construction employers are considering managing the risk more aggressively by providing abuse-related educational programs and drug screening in support of workers' efforts to seek rehabilitation. Some in the industry have even implemented random opioid testing, where, if an employee tests positive, they can keep their jobs upon completion of a treatment program. In addition, insurers suggest the construction industry employers explore partnering together to develop safety programs and guidelines that minimize or eliminate site-related accidents.

Jackson Lewis attorneys are available if you have any questions about workplace safety and drug testing programs.

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