EHS Today

2024 Guide to Construction Safety

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO KEEP WORKERS SAFE, FROM WORKING AT HEIGHTS TO SUMMER HEAT TO MENTAL FITNESS.

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Contents

Introduction

What does it mean to be safe in construction? Construction is the backbone of our society, both literally and figuratively. Building permits are a leading indicator that economists use to make predictions about the economy. Home ownership has long been the American dream.

None of this would be possible without construction workers, who are facing additional physical and mental safety challenges of late.

When discussing the topic of safety in construction, I thought of at least a dozen different areas that we could focus on with this ebook. Take climate change, for example. The past few summers have seen record heat waves across the United States. Places that are used to the heat, such as Arizona, have had an unprecedented number of days where the mercury has sat above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Meanwhile, places that aren't used to heat, such as Washington and Oregon, are struggling to adapt to the hotter and drier weather.

These changing climate patterns seem to be here to stay, but thankfully safety professionals are experts at finding creative solutions. The American Society for Safety Professionals (ASSP) released the first national voluntary consensus standard addressing heat stress for construction and demolition workers. Companies are also developing their own heat stress programs and equipping workers with the latest tools, technology and plenty of beverages to help workers stay cool.

The construction industry must also contend with some difficult topics, including fatalities, mental health and substance use disorder. Construction workers represent only about 7% of the workforce, but they accounted for 15% of all workplace overdose deaths between 2011 and 2016, according to a recent report from Construction Working Minds. What's more, 83% of construction workers have experienced some form of moderate to severe mental health issue.

The data is alarming, but it doesn't represent the full story. After all, you all are actively involved in writing the next chapter. I hope the following articles help you find creative ways to tackle some of construction's most persistent hazards and build a stronger safety culture.

The stakes have never been higher but safety professionals have always risen to the occasion. I have no doubt you are already brainstorming 1,000 different ways to make the construction industry safer. I'm honored to work at *EHS Today*, where I have the privilege of helping you help others. Please let us know how else we can make your job easier.

***Nicole Stempak** is managing editor of* EHS Today *and conference content manager of the Safety Leadership Conference.*

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How to Improve and Promote Safety in Construction

Advice for managing safety in the construction industry, including four ways to get buy-in and seven areas to focus on.

By Hewitt Roberts

The construction industry poses unique health and safety challenges for its workers. In fact, about one out of every five workplace deaths in calendar year 2019 were construction-related, according to OSHA. Luckily, health and safety processes play a vital role in minimizing risks.

I spoke with two industry experts, Steve Mellard, national safety director at Anson Industries, and Desiree Ropel, safety manager at Hermanson Company, for an insider look into building a safety culture within the construction industry.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A SAFETY CULTURE

The term "safety culture" was first used by the International Atomic Energy Agency in its 1986 Chernobyl accident summary report to describe how the thinking and behaviors of people in the nuclear plant contributed to the accident. Decades later, successfully increasing employee buy-in to build a safety culture and safety program is still something that many construction organizations struggle with.

Aside from minimizing health risks and saving your organization money, a safety management program that fosters a safety culture also provides other benefits, including:

- Improvements in quality and production;
- Increased employee morale;
- Gains in employee recruiting and retention; and
- Better image and reputation among customers, suppliers and the community.

If having a safety program is the first step, the second step is ensuring that it is followed and enforced; otherwise, it will have little meaning or impact. Ropel points to the importance of buy-in from all employees: "It's less about the words on the pages and mostly about buy-in from the people," she says.

From the highest level of management to frontline employees, a safety program must have widespread buy-in to be successful. Engendering the importance of safety as a part of culture, rather than an add-on to it, is key.

BARRIERS TO GARNERING EMPLOYEE BUY-IN

There are many reasons why employees may not buy-in to a safety culture, including:

- Employees may be unaware of the safety hazards they face and thus less receptive to the changes required to avoid them.
- The organization may be experiencing rapid growth and there is a lack of emphasis on safety practices.
- Employees don't have, or perceive they don't have, adequate time to follow safety protocols.
- Employees aren't interested in safety issues, or they don't feel these issues are relevant to them.
- Employees feel invincible since they haven't yet had an incident or witnessed a colleague get hurt.
- There is a lack of management involvement and buy-in from the top down.

HOW BUY-IN CAN BE ACHIEVED

Laying out the vision, managing resistance early, and offering rewards and incentives are important first steps to achieving company-wide buy-in of your organization's safety program. Here are four ways to get started:

1. Implement a safety incentive program. Mellard recommends utilizing a rewards program where gift cards and other apparel are awarded for following safety protocols. This helps to show employees—and their families—that safety behavior is valued and rewarded. The program should be simple, and rewards should be given often since safety behavior needs to be repeated daily.

2. Take an individual approach. While Mellard recommends a rewards program, he emphasizes that nothing beats a personalized approach. Employees need to feel heard and have an open forum where they can discuss safety issues freely and directly. It's important that this communication is nonpunitive and is not blame-focused.

3. Enforce safety measures. It's one thing to have a written policy; it's another to actually enforce the policy. Employees need to know that safety is an enforced priority for upper management. Ropel recommends giving employees and field leaders ownership to help develop and enforce the policies. This way, everyone knows they have a voice—and they will be heard.

4. Write checklists. Integrating checklists is an extremely effective tool in creating employee buy-in. Safety solutions can allow for company-wide monitoring, audit and safety scheduling, push reminders, user specific dashboards, and more. This helps to ingrain a safety focus into everyday work and turn safety procedures into a routine part of the workday.

A SAFETY PROGRAM NEEDS STRONG LEADERSHIP

Going hand-in-hand with employee buy-in is a strong leadership team that guides and enforces safety. For the safety program to be successful, leadership must be fully committed and lead by example. Leadership must also be prepared to nip any employee resistance in the bud. This is a crucial ingredient in creating a safety-oriented work culture. Implementing a successful safety program involves more than creating an employee handbook. It is the responsibility of every construction company to foster and nurture a safety culture.

One of the most important things that leadership can bring about is widespread cultural change around the topic of safety. However, Mellard discourages a safety cop approach. When employees view a safety manager as the only person in charge of safety, it becomes almost impossible to get employees to buy-in. Safety on the jobsite is not just the responsibility of the safety manager; it's everyone's responsibility.

Mellard also advises against authoritarian-style safety leadership. Instead, he recommends promoting a leadership style that speaks to employees using their own terminology and references past experiences in the field. This has implications for hiring in leadership positions. Safety managers should be hired not only on their degrees, but also on their experience in construction, their ability to relate to employees and the demands of the job.

Ropel also points to the importance of leadership being seen as a safety resource. They need to be level-headed, keep their composure and approachable to be truly successful at their jobs.

BOOSTING YOUR CONSTRUCTION SAFETY PROGRAM

In addition to achieving employee buy-in and safety leadership, here are seven key areas of focus to boost your safety program and safety culture:

1. Continuous safety training. Laws and policies surrounding workplace safety are constantly changing because of new regulations and standards, incidents, equipment and projects. This means that safety training is not a one-time event. Conducting regular safety training to teach new safety practices, as well as to reinforce existing ones, is crucial to a successful safety management program.

2. Proper tools and equipment. It can be surprisingly common for workers to start a job without the proper tools and equipment, particularly if they are quickly switching between tasks. Your organization's safety program should emphasize that workers never start any job, no matter how small, without all the required tools and safety equipment. After all, accidents only take seconds to happen.

3. Compliance tracking. While your organization may have a robust safety program in place, it won't be fully effective if proper tracking for compliance is not implemented. Your organization needs a centralized system to ensure proper procedures are followed.

4. Contractor safety. Working on a large construction project can often mean that general contractors and subcontractors are also sharing the jobsite. Safety issues can arise if those companies have less than desirable safety cultures. Management should ensure that any contractors present on the jobsite are abiding by the organization's safety rules and procedures as well as following company policy on tracking incidents.

5. Scheduling and budgeting. The bottom line for any construction business is being on schedule and on budget.

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Before standardized safety regulations, many workers were constantly put at risk due to an emphasis on speed and cost. These days, we now know that a healthy workforce is also a cost-effective workforce. The total cost of fatal and nonfatal injuries in the construction industry is estimated at nearly $13 billion annually, according to The Center for Construction Research and Training. Safety needs to be considered as an equal to schedule and budget.

6. Aging workforce adaptations. Studies suggest that injuries are less frequent but more severe among older construction workers. For example, in the journal *Epidemiologic Reviews*, data showed that worker compensation costs increase with the age of workers, in part due to greater lost work time per incident. Organizations can mitigate this risk by adapting the workplace to fit the needs of older workers. This can be done by using lighter tools and materials as well as emphasizing ergonomic working practices.

7. Leveraging technology. A big part of a successful construction safety program is collecting the information and sharing it with all stakeholders. Technology has made it much easier to integrate safety into the workplace. The ability to look at overall trends and create custom reports for all districts, divisions and trades is a huge advantage for leadership and employees alike. Sharing these facts and figures with management, on-site supervision and field personnel can have a positive effect on the overall success of the safety program.

When implementing a construction safety management program, there are many considerations to keep in mind, including leadership, employee buy-in, training, third-party contractors and technology. That said, providing a safe workplace for your employees not only makes good business sense; it is a fundamental component of any successful business.

Achieving and maintaining a safe workplace is both essential and very possible. However, it requires continual leadership, resources and the embedding of a safety culture in the ethos and vision of your company. **EHS**

Hewitt Roberts is the CEO of Certainty Software, an EHS software solutions provider. Previously, he was the CEO of Entropy International. Roberts has been an active participant in the enterprise-level EHS software space since the early 1990s and has authored numerous papers and articles about EHS.

ASSP Announces First Standard on Heat Stress in Construction

The standard details engineering and administrative controls that ensure workers are still hydrated, rested and cool while still meeting business needs.

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The American Society of Safety Professionals (ASSP) has published the first national voluntary consensus standard addressing heat stress for workers in construction and demolition operations.

"This new industry consensus standard is an important development because there is no federal regulation focused on heat stress," said ASSP President Jim Thornton, in a statement following the publication in February 2024. "Employers need expert guidance on how to manage heat-related risks. They must have the tools and resources to identify and help prevent work hazards before an incident occurs."

ANSI/ASSP A10.50-2024, Heat Stress Management in Construction and Demolition Operations, offers guidance on protecting workers, explains how to acclimate workers to high heat conditions, and provides requirements for training employees and supervisors. The standard contains checklists and flowcharts designed to help companies develop clear and effective heat stress management programs that bridge the regulatory gap.

"There are tens of thousands of heat-related illnesses each year linked to construction and demolition sites, and workers have died from exposures to excessive heat," said John Johnson, CSP, chair of the ANSI/ASSP A10 standards committee, in a statement. "This new standard outlines industry best practices and proven solutions to protect workers who commonly do strenuous jobs in challenging conditions."

The A10.50 standard identifies engineering and administrative controls a company can implement to ensure that workers get proper rest, water breaks and shade while still meeting business needs. Recommendations such as medical monitoring and using a buddy system can reduce risks and help prevent heat-related illnesses in many work environments.

While the scope of the standard focuses on construction and demolitions, the guidance can be adapted to protect workers performing other outdoor jobs such as tree trimming, farming, road maintenance and pipeline painting.

The impacts of heat stress can range from mild symptoms (e.g., heat rash and heat cramps) to severe conditions (e.g., heat exhaustion and heat stroke) that can be fatal. More than 400 work-related deaths have been caused by environmental heat exposure since 2011, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The standard includes a detailed emergency response plan if a worker has a severe reaction to excessive heat.

The A10.50 subcommittee that wrote the standard consisted of 30 safety and health experts from businesses, trade unions, consulting firms, universities and government agencies. The inclusive process took three years.

Voluntary consensus standards provide the latest expert guidance and fill gaps where federal standards don't exist. Companies rely on these standards to drive improvement, prevent injuries and promote sustainability. With government regulations being slow to change and often out of date, federal compliance is not sufficient to protect workers.

ASSP leads the development of voluntary consensus standards for the workplace. In its last fiscal year, ASSP created, reaffirmed or revised 15 standards, technical reports and guidance documents, engaging 1,400 safety experts who represented 500 organizations. The Society also distributed more than 14,000 copies of standards. **EHS**

How Contractors can Beat the Summer Heat

Four ways to keep your workers safe and cool while working in extreme heat.

By Shayne Stevens

The construction industry requires great attention to safety. For that reason, leaders must prioritize implementing company-wide practices to protect their workers.

At Rosendin, we rely on thousands of craft workers to successfully build some of the country's largest industrial and commercial projects. We have made it an ongoing mission to help our workers recognize dangers and protect them from harm of any kind. When completing projects in drier regions where heat waves are common, such as Arizona and Texas, we also face the unique challenges that come with working in extreme heat.

Understanding the possible effects of working in hot weather and creating plans to reduce and prevent heat illness are essential elements of maintaining workers' health. Rosendin has developed a comprehensive Heat Illness Prevention Plan to help workers across the nation follow safe practices.

In addition, we develop Site-Specific Safety Plans (SSSP) that include specific heat mitigation plans based on the conditions at each site. This can vary based on specific factors, such as regional temperatures, access to shade and indoor cooling, and time spent outside.

For example, in Arizona, Regional Safety Director Rick Brown and his team create, implement and refine SSSPs to ensure workers have mandatory shade in working conditions exceeding 80 degrees Fahrenheit, pre-shift meetings to review the high heat procedures and adjusted workloads. When needed, Brown and his team reduce the severity of work by

scheduling slower-paced or less physically demanding work during the hottest parts of the day and the heaviest work activities during the cooler parts of the day.

Rosendin's plans have proven to significantly reduce jobsite heat hazards while increasing employee and subcontractor involvement in every aspect of safety. Any company can achieve similar results through ongoing training on environmental and personal risk factors for heat illness. Here are four crucial heat illness prevention elements that you can incorporate to keep your construction workers safe while working in the heat.

1. TRAIN FOR HEAT

Commercial construction jobs can be challenging, as workers are performing tasks outside or in partial structures, such as high-rise buildings, arenas, health care centers and renewable energy facilities.

Companies should require employees to undergo training to recognize heat illness symptoms, including heavy sweating, cramps, weakness and dizziness. They should also learn to use prevention methods as well as their region's required Heat Illness Prevention Standards and OSHA regulations. This should entail having project teams conduct safety orientation training on how to respond to heat-related illnesses.

Rosendin also encourages all on-site contractors to work together as a team to actively watch workers for these heat illness symptoms and other heat-related issues. Once training is completed, we provide our teams with hard hat sombreros, neck shades, cooling towels and water-soaked gel bandanas.

2. ENCOURAGE PROPER HYDRATION

The most important tip for keeping employees safe is to make sure they stay hydrated by drinking water regularly. Mild dehydration can impair a person's ability to concentrate. Even as little as 1% loss in body weight due to fluid deficiency can impair short-term memory.

On outdoor jobsites during the summer, we address the heat with a variety of responses, including water bottles, water stations and water coolers. They are available to everyone on the site, especially the field staff. To encourage workers to drink water more frequently, supervisors can implement simple practices, such as placing water coolers close to where staff are working and making an hourly announcement to drink fluids.

In addition to water, consider stocking up on ice pops or other products that contain electrolytes, such as sports drinks, coconut water and hydration powders. You'll also want to remind workers to avoid liquids during the workweek that can be dehydrating, such as alcohol and caffeine.

3. PROVIDE ACCESS TO SHADE

In addition to adequate hydration stations, it is also important for workers to have access to shade that is open to the air or includes ventilation, such as fans or cooling mists.

On some Rosendin jobsites, we are able to provide specially designed cooling trailers with a large portable air conditioning unit that is powered by a generator. These are particularly helpful in our renewable energy projects, as they are usually in remote areas with little natural shade.

The most important tip for keeping employees safe is to make sure they stay hydrated.

These trailers, which are opened up to the air stream, have been instrumental in providing employees a place to go to cool down, recharge and hydrate before returning to work in the hot sun. At any time, employees can go sit in the trailers if they get overheated. We also encourage our foremen to strategically set up mobile pop-up tents and shaded areas throughout jobsites.

Once temperatures exceed 95 degrees Fahrenheit, consider increasing breaks to help workers cool down and hydrate. In the South and other warm climates, companies can also add air conditioned lunch tents and cooling trailers with fans and mist to mitigate overheating. In conditions of extreme heat, companies can train supervisors to observe employees for alertness and other signs or symptoms of heat illness. Companies can also mandate recovery rest periods.

4. FOLLOW ACCLIMATIZATION PROCEDURES

Working during a heat wave can be challenging, especially for people who are not used to it. It is important to let their bodies adjust to the heat by limiting exposure in the beginning, encouraging them to take more breaks and staying hydrated.

For these workers, it's good practice to let them start earlier in the day when temperatures are cooler and schedule the heaviest work activities during this time, leaving less physically demanding work for hotter parts of the day. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the best outcome for workers is to gradually increase work hours in hot conditions over a 7- to 14-day period, cool off and properly rehydrate between shifts.

Rosendin limits new employees to 8-hour shifts for the first four days and does not assign overtime until employees acclimate to the work environment. We also encourage employees and supervisors to use the buddy system and maintain regular communication via cell phone to monitor their health.

Heat is an unavoidable factor for building projects during the summer or in hot locations. It is crucial for employers to safeguard their workers by drafting—and enforcing—detailed procedures to adjust to changing weather conditions.

As the world's temperatures rise due to climate change, these best practices will become increasingly relevant as heat waves and high temperatures become more prevalent, particularly in locations that have never had to deal with these working circumstances. Knowing how to avoid the dangers of extreme heat, as well as how to handle the symptoms of heat illness, is critical for a well-rounded safety strategy. **EHS**

Shayne Stevens, CSP, CHST, CMSP, is the senior corporate safety director at Rosendin, the nation's largest employee-owned electrical contracting firm. **EHS Today** ***named Rosendin one of America's Safest Companies of 2021. Shayne works out of the company's regional office in Tempe, Ariz.***

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Safety Starts at the Top—and with Better Head Protection

It's time to reconsider what head protection you provide construction workers because safety has lasting repercussions for employers and employees alike.

By Ryan Barnes

Construction sites are dangerous places, and they will continue to be dangerous places until we do something to make them safer.

In 2020, the incidence rate for nonfatal falls, slips or trips was higher for construction laborers (52.5 cases per 10,000 full-time workers) compared to all workers (22.9 cases), according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). It's no surprise; there are construction jobsite risks everywhere, from falling objects to infectious diseases to chemical hazards.

To protect themselves, industrial tradespeople have worn traditional hard hats, the safety norm for more than a century. Conventional hard hats are designed primarily to protect the head from falling objects. However, there are many other ways that workers can seriously injure their heads on a construction site, including falls, slips and trips. Construction workers, therefore, need more protection than a traditional hard hat can provide.

A CHANGE OF HATS

Falls represent the third deadliest risk to construction personnel. In 2020, there were 1,008 documented fatal falls throughout the construction industry in the United States, about 35% of all construction accidents, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). These data points are not surprising, considering that more than half of the construction industry works on scaffolds, dramatically increasing the risk of falls from heights and related traumatic brain injuries (TBIs).

In response, the industry is beginning to rethink head protection. In lieu of the antiquated (Type I) hard hat, more plant operators, construction safety officers and others are considering the new Type II safety helmet for its superior safety as part of the broader personal protective equipment (PPE) product mix.

These ANSI-certified Type II safety helmets provide 360-degree head protection. Type II safety helmets integrate better shock-absorbing technology and feature front, side and rear impact protection. They also have chin straps and other technologies to keep the helmet on the head while offering better protection in the event of an accident. Some models even feature a rotational technology that reduces force to the brain from oblique or angled strikes.

These helmets typically require a greater up-front investment compared to a traditional hard hat but, in return, workers enjoy a significantly safer and usually more comfortable experience. That's because type II safety helmets are designed to improve wearability. Most importantly, they are considerably more effective at protecting tradespeople from severe injury or even death.

Here are some additional safety features that Type II helmets can offer:

Impact protection. Impact protection technology, such as welded-tube polymers developed by Koroyd, mean that helmets crumple instantly on impact. This allows the helmet to absorb maximum force, thereby protecting the skull and brain from both direct and angled impacts in the process.

Angled impacts are more likely to cause rotational shifts of the brain in the skull, which can lead to more severe injury. Therefore, reducing the impact of angled and oblique impacts, in particular, can help reduce the risk of a life-changing or life-threatening injury.

Identification technology. If a workplace incident does occur, some helmets include an integrated chip based on near-field communication (NFC) technology that stores emergency contacts and critical medical information for first responders to access. twICEme, for example, is a technology that utilizes NFC to enable first responders to scan the data from the top of the helmet to an app on their mobile device.

With traditional hardhats, workers often will include vital health information on a piece of paper affixed inside the hard hat. For certain head and neck injuries, this method can be problematic, as medical personnel may not want to remove the helmet initially to avoid further injury. This identification technology ensures critical data can be communicated quickly, even when the helmet cannot safely be removed.

Modular rear brims. Helmets may feature a slight rear brim designed for rain deflection or the traditional brim form factor to help protect against outdoor conditions. Depending on the jobsite and conditions, some Type II helmets enable the wearer to remove and replace brim components to further improve comfort and utility.

Four-point chin strap systems. Buckle enclosures with an adjustable nylon four-point chin strap are commonly found in action sports helmets, such as biking and rock climbing. When added to an industrial safety helmet, they offer construction workers maximum adjustability and easy one-handed use with gloves. The chin straps also keep the helmet in place versus the traditional strapless hard hat.

A SAFER WORKPLACE

Falls, trips and slips represent some of the leading causes of serious injury and death for construction workers, but they are preventable.

Organizations can better protect their workers by following OSHA's recommendations, including its recent "Fall Protection Campaign." Furthermore, employers can better protect the workforce through investments in safer PPE, including Type II safety helmets.

According to the BLS, most of these head injuries resulting from a slip, trip or fall happen from heights of 6 feet or less. This is one of the main reasons why many commercial general contractors are mandating Type II safety helmets with chin straps, along with other certifications and requirements, to help ensure compliance with many high-profile jobsites.

Here are some of the other ways Type II helmets can keep workers safe on the job:

- Type II safety helmets offer physical and material advantages compared to traditional hard hats. They offer other safety benefits, including lower PPE turnover. Type II safety helmet lifetimes also typically last longer thanks to more thoughtful, ruggedized designs.
- Type II helmets can result in an overall lower risk of workplace injury thanks to front, side and rear impact safety and chin straps that help protect the head during falls; traditional Type I hard hats are only designed to protect the top of the head from falling objects.
- Fewer injuries equate to fewer workers' compensation claims, representing a huge savings in productivity.
- A reduction in injuries can also help lower liability insurance costs.
- Overall risk reduction for the workplace.
- Stronger safety culture and an environment of caring.
- Increased productivity and potentially more earnings for workers, who can spend more time on the jobsite and less time recovering from injuries.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the day, the construction industry is built by individuals who apply their skills, strengths and talents to complete the project.

Although construction is physical work, the most essential asset for anyone working on a jobsite remains their brain—the most complex and important tool of all. Organizations, and workers themselves, are realizing the need to protect this most precious asset as much as possible for the sake of the build and everyone's livelihood and well-being.

Type II safety helmets are becoming the new safety standard. As forward-looking organizations voluntarily transition, they can remain confident that the investment is worth the cost from a strict dollars-and-cents view beyond the twin goal of creating a safety-first culture. **EHS**

Ryan Barnes is founder and CEO of Studson, a U.S.-based industrial Type II safety helmet maker. Since its founding in 2020, Studson aims to consistently deliver the most innovative industrial head protection equipment to save lives—and livelihoods. Barnes brings more than 20 years of experience from the sports, outdoor and consumer product goods markets across sales, marketing, product management and business development roles to revolutionize the industrial helmet safety market.

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The Biggest Danger in Construction is Poor Mental Health

While you can't magically remove stress from the workplace, there are measures you can take to help reduce workers' stress.

By Jill Fleming

Ask what the top dangers of construction work are, and you'll get the same answers almost every time: falls, electrocution, caught-ins and struck-bys. However, more construction workers die from suicide each year than every other workplace-related fatality combined.

In fact, the construction industry has the highest suicide rate of any profession, and more than 80% of construction workers have experienced stress at work. Working tirelessly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to support their families and communities has only exacerbated the stress, burnout and mental health struggles for these essential workers.

But there's a deeper issue: Most individuals struggling with mental health do not seek help or express their feelings to others.

In the male-dominated world of construction—where mental health discussions are rare—it's critical for employers to cultivate a workplace environment in which workers feel supported and comfortable discussing mental health issues. Providing support and the right resources can help shift the industry's outdated mindset around mental well-being.

STRESSED IN SILENCE

Workers in the construction industry are more vulnerable to burnout than in any other field—and for good reason. Long, irregular hours spent in dangerous work environments, along with the added stress of job insecurity, are major stressors.

The majority of construction workers never express their feelings or seek help. Nearly 60% of construction workers reported struggling with mental health but only one-third said they would communicate this to their employers. Their reasons for not telling their employer about their struggles

include feelings of embarrassment, a belief their employer wouldn't be able to help, and the fear it would negatively impact their career.

The stigma around mental health discussions—particularly among men, who make up nearly 90% of the construction industry—causes individuals to resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms. Chronic stress can contribute to more serious mental and physical health issues, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, exhaustion, decreased immune system, depression and anxiety. But it's not just individual employees who are at risk. Here are two ways the mental health of your employees can affect your entire organization.

More mistakes. Depression and anxiety, coupled with long workdays, can lead to a lack of sleep, a significant hazard on construction sites. Construction work is dangerous and often involves handling heavy machinery, performing electrical work or working on tall buildings. The likelihood of accidents is even greater when exhaustion and mental absenteeism enter into the equation. More mistakes increase the likelihood of accidents, resulting in more injuries and legal implications for your company.

Lost focus and decreased productivity. Poor mental health contributes to lost productivity in the workplace, such as a lack of focus on-site and missed work due to sick days. Research shows there is a negative and significant correlation between job burnout and job performance, which can also negatively affect relationships between colleagues. Additionally, employees with mental health issues are twice as likely to be distracted on the job. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, depression causes an estimated 200 million lost workdays each year, costing organizations valuable time and money.

Not surprisingly, the prevalence of mental health issues is significantly higher in organizations that fail to prioritize the well-being of their workers. It's critical to pursue strategies to proactively reduce stress and promote mental health in the workplace.

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR WORKERS' MENTAL HEALTH

Cultivating a supportive workplace environment begins with reducing the stigma around mental health. By normalizing these discussions and providing the right tools and resources, you can create a safe space for your workers. Here are three areas where you can focus your efforts.

Take preventative measures. While you can't magically remove stress from the workplace, there are measures you can take to help reduce workers' stress. Job stress is caused by several factors, with role ambiguity being one of the top contributors. You can avoid this by clearly communicating what your expectations are, what your workers' specific roles are, and who each individual should take directions from on-site. You should also encourage your workers to take regular breaks, which are good for both their mental and physical health. But for preventative measures to gain traction, you need supervisors and managers to model self-care and take breaks themselves.

Training supervisors to spot signs of mental health struggles and high stress is an invaluable preventative measure to invest in. But this type of training is much more effective if you have a solid rapport with your workers. Vulnerability is essential in building strong relationships with your workers. To practice this, share your own failures, discuss personal topics outside of your work and, most importantly, be genuine.

Discuss to destigmatize. Adherence to masculine norms is typical in the construction industry, and it often prevents men from expressing their emotions and speaking up about mental health struggles. While eliminating the stigma about mental health is no easy feat, supervisors and workers may benefit from regular mental health check-ins. Research from Health Shield shows that 57% of workers would feel more loyal to their jobs, be more productive and take less time off work if their employer supported their mental well-being.

Another way to improve workers' mental health involves hosting guest speakers and seminars in the workplace. It's important to find a diverse pool of speakers who your workers can relate to and who can act as positive role models. Hearing others speak up about mental struggles can help workers recognize their own struggles and encourage them to seek help.

Provide tools for outside the workplace. Some people are simply not willing to express their mental health concerns, regardless of how supportive your workplace may be. To help these individuals, you need to provide resources and tools for workers to use on their own time. An effective first step is to increase awareness around local and national resources, such as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). SAMHSA offers a national helpline that provides referral routing services for individuals and families facing mental health challenges and substance use disorders. You can also compile information about nearby resource centers and their hours to make it convenient for workers to receive the help they need outside the workplace.

Another worthwhile resource is an employee well-being platform, which can range from a mobile app to a website portal. Here, you can provide short videos about topics such as exercise and the importance of gut health for mental health, options to log food or exercise, and quizzes to gauge well-being. Tools like these are meant to educate and motivate workers while creating a culture of support. An employee well-being platform allows workers to explore these options in the comfort of their homes and share resources with family members.

NORMALIZE DISCUSSIONS AROUND MENTAL HEALTH

Your main priority should be the safety of your workers, including their mental health. Stigmas about mental health have prevented many people, especially men, from seeking the help they need. In the construction industry, redefining gender norms and cultural expectations can help normalize mental health discussions, reduce suicide rates and encourage workers to speak up about their struggles. **EHS**

Jill Fleming is president and CEO of Olive Consulting Solutions. Previously, she was the vice president of human resources at ISN, a provider of contractor management services, where she managed team initiatives, including benefits programs, wellness offerings, recruiting, inclusion and diversity, and training and development.

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Clear Vision: Safeguarding Construction Workers' Eyes on the Job

A third of occupational eye injuries require trips to the emergency room, and at least 100 result in one or more days away from work.

By David Perecman

Each year, more than 2,000 workers suffer eye injuries in the workplace that require medical treatment, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). A third of all reported occupational eye injuries require trips to the emergency room, and at least 100 of these incidents result in one or more days away from work.

One of the most at-risk groups of workers is those within the construction and labor trade industries. With this being a common and serious injury on construction sites, it's important for both employers and workers to come together to mitigate risks and know what steps to take should an accident occur.

TYPES OF EYE INJURIES ON CONSTRUCTION SITES

Workers in the construction industry, as well as other trades (e.g., electrical, welding, carpentry and plumbing) are often at a heightened risk of injuries due to the nature of their job tasks. Depending on the severity, eye injuries can result in total, partial or permanent vision loss. Accidents on the job that result in damage to the eye are often caused by one of the following:

- Scrape or strike;
- Impact or penetration; or
- Chemical or thermal burns.

The majority of eye injuries are due to scrapes or strikes

and can result from objects or debris coming in contact with the eye. This may include—but is not limited to—dust, cement chips, wood particles or wood slivers. These particles are often projected by tools, picked up by the wind or may fall on the worker from above. Impact and penetration injuries are serious and often require emergency medical intervention. Things like staples, nails, wood chips or pieces, and metal slivers can pierce the eyeball.

On jobsites, workers may be exposed to industrial chemicals or cleaning products that drip, squirt or splash into the eyes, causing burns. Laborers who work with tools that emit heat (e.g., blowtorches, casters or furnaces) or hot surfaces (e.g., metal forks and rods) may be at risk of thermal burns. Welders also face the risk of burns from the arc welding process that emits UV rays, bright flashes and even sparks that can harm the skin and eyes.

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SAFETY TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS, WORKERS

Under Occupational Safety & Health Act, employers have a responsibility to provide a reasonably safe work environment and take steps to prevent accidents that cause injuries. For this reason, it's important that employers and safety site managers take the lead in implementing awareness initiatives and risk mitigation tactics on jobsites to keep workers safe.

Assess hazards on jobsites. Employers and/or safety site managers should scan the work area for potential risks prior to workers performing job duties. This means taking regular walk-through audits of the site to help identify hazards and assessing tools to make sure they are functioning properly and being used correctly by workers.

Proper use of PPE. The use of proper protective eyewear and safety gear while performing work tasks is key. In the construction industry, many workers are advised to use safety goggles or glasses while performing job tasks. Protective eyewear should cover the worker's eyes without leaving gaps between the seal and their skin. The eyewear should be construction-grade material and able to withstand a blow or puncture. In addition, welders will need welding lenses and goggles specifically designed to safeguard them against sparks, heat, radiation and debris.

Invest time and resources into training. Before beginning work tasks, it's important that the employer or manager reviews the latest safety procedures, potential risk hazards and steps to take should an accident occur. Managers should discuss the tasks to be completed for the shift and what PPE is required to perform them. Workers should test their protective eyewear to ensure it fits snuggly to their face and against the skin with no gaps. All training guides and instructions should comply with local, state and federal safety regulations.

STEPS TO TAKE FOLLOWING AN ACCIDENT

Should a worker suffer an eye-related injury while on the job, it's important that they follow emergency procedures and protocols. If the worker has debris in their eye, it's important to advise them not to rub, touch or put pressure on the eye as it could further damage its surface. If the debris is small, such as sand or dust, and hasn't caused severe damage to the eye, consider flushing the eye with sterile water or eye wash solution. If the debris cannot be removed by flushing out the eye, place a patch or lightly bandage the eye until the worker can see a doctor.

Some injuries should be considered medical emergencies. One is if an object has penetrated or cut the eyeball. Always advise the worker not to try to remove the object themselves. Another would be if an eye has had direct exposure to chemical solutions. If the worker gets chemicals in their eyes, have them use sterile water or an eye wash solution. Even if the worker initially says that they are okay after these incidents, consider that they may be in shock and unaware of how serious the damage is. If the injury is severe and emergency care is needed, do not hesitate to call 911.

In many instances, if the worker suffers an eye injury while performing workplace duties, they may be able to recover financial losses for medical expenses, lost wages and disability coverage by filing a workers' compensation claim. While laws vary from state to state, in many jurisdictions, a worker may be able to file for workers' compensation benefits, regardless of whether the worker or employer was at fault.

Suppose the injury occurs due to a third party's negligence outside of an employer. In that case, a worker may consider pursuing a personal injury lawsuit to recover damages associated with the condition sustained. Damages awarded in these claims are provided to make victims "whole." They can include compensation for medical expenses, lost income, future wages or diminished earning potential, pain and suffering, as well as mental anguish, quality of life loss, and other emotional injuries. Those seeking to pursue legal action against a negligent third party may wish to seek the guidance of an experienced workplace accident lawyer. **EHS**

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