

AT THE END OF THE WORKDAY, EVERYONE GOES HOME SAFE.

Opioid Deaths & Construction

Toolbox Talk



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Opioids are narcotics that act on opioid receptors to produce morphine-like effects. Medically, they are primarily used for pain relief, including anesthesia. Opioids can be prescribed medications, such as Codeine, Fentanyl, Morphine, Oxycodone, Hydromorphone, and Medical Heroin. Opioids can also be produced or obtained illegally.

Opioid Deaths and Construction:

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), over 250 lives were lost to drugs every day in the United States in 2020. A study published in July 2021 reported that during the COVID pandemic, the U.S. saw some of the deadliest months on record for the opioid overdose epidemic. The drastic acceleration of the U.S. overdose crisis during the COVID pandemic calls for an increased dedication to all prevention efforts.

Construction workers have been shown in many studies to have high rates of death from overdose compared to workers in other occupations. For example, a study in 2018 showed that among all occupations, construction workers had the highest rate of death from overdose, including overdose from heroin. Data from 2011-2016 showed that **construction workers experienced 15% of all workplace overdose deaths (despite rep-**

resenting about 7% of the workforce). That same study showed that the construction industry had the third-highest rate of workplace overdose fatalities from all substances among industries in the U.S.

What Can Employers Do?

- **Prevent Injuries:** Work shouldn't hurt! Make sure that you follow your work safety practices procedures.
- **Talk to Your 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 and other forms of pain management such as physical therapy or acupuncture. Remember that opioids should be the last option to treat your pain. If opioids are prescribed, they should be used for the shortest possible time.
- **Take-Home Naloxone Kits and First Aid Take-home Naloxone Kits:** These are for individuals who are at risk of an opioid overdose and for their friends, family, and others who might witness an overdose. To obtain a Naloxone kit in Idaho at no cost to you, and for more information on overdose response visit the Idaho Department of Health & Welfare by scanning the QR code in the corner.

- **First aid:** Call 911 immediately if you think someone is having an overdose. Check airway/breathing. If someone is not breathing and you have reason to suspect an opioid overdose, administer Naloxone, following kit instructions.

Real Life Application:

A roofing crew was engaged in roofing activities on the roof of a stadium. Coworkers noticed that one team member was mumbling and not responding coherently to questions. 911 was called, an onsite medical team and the fire department emergency services responded. The roofer died. The subsequent coroner's report specified cocaine intoxication as the cause of death.

Talking Points:

1. Could the roofer's life have been saved with the use of Naloxone/Narcan on the jobsite?
2. What is our company's policy regarding opioid use in the workplace?
3. What resources do I have to help with pain management?



