

Why Are There So Many **Suicides** in the Construction Industry?

by Bob Swanson

Suicide and mental health are issues that are too often overlooked in our society. The construction industry, in particular, has one of the highest rates of suicide per industry. Mental illnesses are diseases affecting the brain that can be monitored and treated. According to many medical and psychological associations, including the American Psychological Association, suicide is preventable.

In 2016, there were nearly 45,000 suicide deaths in the United States. This is an increase of 35 percent in the past 10 years. It is also estimated that there are up to 25 suicide attempts for each suicide death.

The construction industry has the second highest suicide rate per industry. The suicide rate of our industry is 53 per 100,000, which is four times the rate of the general population. However, with the total number of individuals in construction, our industry has more suicide deaths than any other industry.

What contributes to this high rate of suicide in our industry?

- Our industry is customer driven, which means overnight travel, shift work, weekend work and long hours are often required. These factors all impact personal relationships, normal sleep and diet. They also affect the ability to maintain normal external support systems.
- Seasonal work and project-specific employment creates financial insecurity and personal uncertainty.
- Long-term, repetitive physical work often results in chronic pain, which can lead to the regular use of prescription medications and self-medication. This can lead to an addiction to alcohol and/or drugs.
- There is a general acceptance in our industry of the regular use of alcohol and/or drugs.
- Use of a firearm is a common means of suicide, and many in our industry own firearms because they enjoy hunting and shooting.
- An "old school, tough guy" persona is prevalent in our male-dominated industry. Due to this persona, employees are less likely to show any vulnerability or seek help.

It is essential for each of us to achieve a reasonable life balance of a healthy diet, adequate sleep, regular exercise and stable personal relationships. For a person living with a mental illness, a reasonable life balance is absolutely critical in preventing the onset of a mental crisis.

Remember that all mental illnesses are treatable and suicide is preventable!

For more resources, visit:

- ✓ www.finishingcontractors.org/preventsuicide/resources
- ✓ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1 (800) 273-8255
- ✓ 911: Ask for a Crisis Intervention Team
- ✓ National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): www.nami.org
- ✓ Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE): www.save.org
- ✓ American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: www.afsp.org
- ✓ Working Minds - Suicide Prevention in the Construction Workplace: www.constructionworkingminds.org

