

New York City Construction Contractor Group Calls for Mental Health Reforms for Industry

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A leading New York City contractor association is spearheading an effort to raise awareness about the importance of mental wellness in the construction industry and seek legislative reform.

The Business Trades Employers' Association (BTEA) represents 1,200 union contractors in New York City. BTEA cites data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Bureau of Labor Statistics showing that construction workers are six times more likely to die from suicide than from job site-related injuries and four times more likely to commit suicide than the average American. At 53.3 per 100,000 U.S. workers, the suicide rate in the construction industry is second only to mining. In addition, construction workers disproportionately suffer from opioid addiction. According to non-profit Center for Construction Research and Training, in 2022, there were 17 times more overdose deaths in the industry than fatal work injuries.

To combat these problems, BTEA is calling for legislation to provide mental health support to supplement physical safety measures, including:

- New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to report annually on suicides categorized by industry
- New York City Department of Buildings to incorporate mental wellness into its Site Safety Training Program
- Require mental wellness be discussed as part of on-site safety orientations
- Require Naloxone (Narcan) be available on larger construction sites to treat drug overdoses

In addition, BTEA is calling on the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to include mental wellness in OSHA 10-hour and 30-hour safety training.

Other contractor and owner organizations, unions, and non-profit organizations support BTEA's efforts, including the Real Estate Board of New York, the New York Building Congress, the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York, and the Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention.

BTEA notes that laws and regulations already require safety training for almost 400,000 construction workers in New York City, and many more nationwide, but none of the mandatory training includes mental wellness. BTEA calls this a wasted opportunity to save lives.

Mental health issues among men — who make up the vast majority of the construction industry — often go untreated because men are less likely than women to seek help, according to a study by the National Library of Medicine. A spokesperson for the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) noted that the lack of mental health resources “goes hand in hand with having a very male-dominated industry.” AGC has its

own Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Task Force and provides mental health resources to its members, but it has not yet called for legislative action.

Some companies are seeking to address mental health issues on their own. BTEA wants to make mental health programming mandatory for the industry, at least in New York City. Adoption of the BTEA proposal by OSHA, or similar initiatives in other regions, could result in changes nationwide.

Contractors should monitor the progress of BTEA's efforts in New York City and be prepared to implement mental health training if the proposed reforms are enacted. Contractors may want to consider adding mental health awareness to their safety training, even in the absence of legislative requirements.

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