



Building Trades Employers' Association proposes reforms for mental health awareness in the construction industry

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New York, NY The Building Trades Employers' Association (BTEA), representing 1,200 union contractors in New York, has worked to raise awareness about the importance of mental wellness in the construction industry and is preparing a package of proposals calling on the City of New York to include mental wellness within the safety training construction workers receive, and to report on suicides in the industry.

According to BTEA, workers are nearly 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.

The BTEA is implementing several proposals that will require mental wellness training in New York City and across the country, track the progress being made to address the crisis, and provide greater access to treatment.

In 2022, more than 6,000 construction workers died from suicide across the country, according to an analysis by The Center for Construction Research and Training based on Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data. Among different professions, no occupation has a higher rate of suicide than construction.

"Mental wellness and suicide prevention are uncomfortable topics, especially in the construction industry," said BTEA president and CEO Elizabeth Crowley. "People don't like to discuss it, but we need to talk about it. Construction workers have the highest rates of suicide among any occupation in the country, and we implore our City, State and federal leaders to strengthen protections for these essential workers who serve as the backbone of our country's prosperity."

The BTEA and its member companies, along with its union partners and industry leaders, have prioritized raising awareness about mental health in a variety of ways, including worker training, throughout the past year. This year, the BTEA intends to move from awareness to action, as it proposes legislation to report on suicides in the construction industry, require mental wellness training, and require life-saving medicine to be available on construction sites.

"Approximately 390,000 construction workers in New York City and countless nationally are required to have safety training, but none of that training includes mental wellness," said BTEA executive vice president Patrick Wehle. "This is a tremendous, missed opportunity that, if corrected, will save lives."

At its June 27th SAFEBUILD Conference, the BTEA called for the following reforms:

- NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene to report annually on suicides categorized by industry
- NYC Department of Buildings to incorporate mental wellness into Site Safety Training Programs
- 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
- The Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) to include mental wellness within their OSHA-10 and OSHA-30 training

“We know that by acknowledging the need to address total wellness, we will make our industry even stronger,” said Crowley. “We want to raise awareness, reduce the stigma around mental wellness and save lives – keeping our workers and their families together.”

As part of its advocacy, the BTEA hosted its annual SAFEBUILD safety conference on June 27th, recognizing construction industry leaders in best safety practices and training, including mental wellness.

“America’s hard working construction professionals are vital to our nation’s future, and tragically, we are losing so many in the industry to suicide,” said Bob Gebbia, CEO of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). “At AFSP, we are providing critical mental health resources and programming to reach 500,000 construction workers across the country over the next five years. And we support the proposals offered by the BTEA, which will connect construction workers to mental health and suicide prevention training and ensure life-saving treatment is available on construction sites. We applaud BTEA for its focus on mental health and look forward to working with them to help save lives.”

“A critical piece of DOB’s role is to promote the well-being of the workers in our industry, and that extends beyond their physical safety at the job site,” said NYC Department of Buildings Commissioner Jimmy Oddo. “BTEA’s commitment to raising awareness and advocating for mental wellness is a crucial step in addressing this crisis. By including mental wellness within the safety training for construction workers and reporting on suicides in the industry, we can begin to provide the support these workers desperately need.”

“A key priority for the Building Trades is ensuring that all construction workers return home to their families at the end of each shift by advocating for their health and safety on the job site, and this includes their mental wellbeing,” said Gary LaBarbera, president of the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York. “This is why we are proud to join BTEA for the SAFEBUILD Conference in support of these important proposals to better incorporate a mental wellness focus within the standard safety training available to construction workers in New York. Our tradesmen

and tradeswomen are the backbone of our middle class and countless key initiatives moving forward throughout our city, and it is clear that more must be done to support their mental and physical wellbeing so that they may take full advantage of the opportunities created by a career in the unionized construction industry.”

“REBNY supports the mental wellness proposals put forward at the SAFEBUILD Conference and applauds BTEA for taking on this important topic,” said James Whelan, president of the Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY). “We hope lawmakers will act on them, as they may inspire further conversations on suicide prevention across industries.”

“Thank you BTEA for making Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in Construction your focus of the SafeBuild safety conference again this year,” said Sonya Bohmann, executive director of the construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention (CIASP). “Your commitment to highlighting this problem and championing solutions to make suicide prevention and mental wellness part of the training and education for everyone on a jobsite will save lives! The Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention is happy work to together to amplify the need to Stop the Stigma around this conversation and share resources to promote our collective mission to end construction suicide.”

“The health and well-being of the people who build up our city and communities should always be a priority,” said Carlo Scissura, Esq., president and CEO of the New York Building Congress. “We have an obligation to ensure the safety of the workers across our industry, and that includes providing access to mental health resources that help overcome stigmas and save lives. These common-sense measures are a vital and necessary first step for the State and City to take to help build a stronger, healthier industry that cares for our fellow New Yorkers.”

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