

By Kate Carsella, Associate Editor

LABOR

Construction's Opioid Epidemic



The opioid epidemic has taken a grim toll on the construction industry, including lost lives, lost revenue, excess expense, and high turnover. Construction workers suffer the highest rate of job-related injury and illness compared with all other occupations, and opioids make up 20 percent of total spending on prescription drugs in the industry. The pressure to quickly get back to work after injury may also lead to increased opioid use.

A new report by the Midwest Economic Policy Institute confirms that Midwestern states have been hit hard. Ohio had the highest estimated rate of opioid overdoses in construction, the highest rate of fatal opioid overdoses for the total population, and the highest estimated number of construction worker deaths from opioid overdoses.

Wisconsin is estimated to have the highest long-term cost per construction fatality, which includes lost production, lost income, and pain and suffering. The lowest estimated cost is in Iowa. The total estimated cost of fatal opioid overdoses for construction workers per year in the seven Midwestern states studied is nearly \$5.2 billion.

The report offers seven recommendations for contractors, labor unions,

and elected officials, including changes to health care policies, expanded education, changes to a worker's duties while taking prescription drugs post-injury, substance abuse treatment funding, and expanded offerings for the amount of paid sick leave.

The report concludes that construction firms must take a more preventative approach. The current method of handling the opioid crisis is expensive and unsustainable, given rising costs and the continuing labor shortage.

"Taking tangible steps to combat this crisis is a moral and economic imperative for both industry leaders and elected officials," says report author Jill Manzo.

GREEN BUILDING

Passive Building on the Rise

Passive building is seeing a resurgence in North America since the first Passive House was certified in the U.S. in 2003. In 2011, 27 structures were certified, including single-family, multifamily, commercial, and government housing. As of 2017, 123 structures have been Passive House-certified.

What began as a construction industry response to the energy shortages of the 1970s is a burgeoning green building sector today. The Passive House Institute U.S. (PHIUS) sets design principles intended to help structures attain energy efficiency and comfort. Rigorous qualifications include an airtight building envelope with continuous insulation, high-performance triple-pane windows and doors, and strict solar energy management.

But how well do Passive Houses handle moisture? PHIUS advises that superinsulation; constant, low-level ventilation; and an airtight building

envelope will reduce temperature fluctuations, preventing the occurrence of condensation and mold.

Michael Knezovich, PHIUS communications director, says that making the passive building standard more cost-effective and practical has helped to revitalize the method. "The new standard still puts conservation first, but takes into account the substantial differences between North American and Central European climate conditions," he says.

Homeowner comfort appears to be powering the growth of passive building in the U.S. "Once people experience the quiet, the absence of drafts in Passive Houses, they love it. The homes are resilient and remain comfortable during power outages," according to Knezovich.

In 2015, the latest passive housing standard was released, and PHIUS is expected to release an updated standard in 2018. "Obviously, technological and market conditions are constantly changing, so we want to be sure the standard keeps pace," Knezovich says.

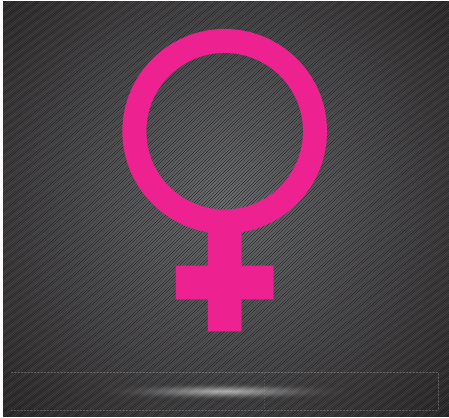
MARKETING

Women, Wellness a Market Force

When assessing buyer preferences, looking beyond generational stereotypes is essential. "All age groups are teaching us what they want," says strategist and Meyers Research principal Mollie Carmichael. At a presentation during this year's International Builders' Show, Carmichael outlined trends shaping buyer desire across demographics.

In 2018 and 2019 a vast share of homebuyers will be Baby Boomers and Generation Xers, yet Millennials make up the largest group of potential

[MARKET UPDATE]



buyers. In her presentation, Carmichael stressed the power of female buyers, technology, and the importance of efficiency in selling and delivering a home.

“She Power” is a dominant market force, says Carmichael, who cautions

builders not to overlook women in their marketing strategies. Women control 51 percent of personal wealth in the U.S. and drive 85 percent of all consumer purchases. Single women are the second largest group of homebuyers, after families.

In the buying process, mounting numbers of consumers seek automated commerce—virtual-reality tours, electronic paperwork, and the ability to purchase a home sight-unseen. Smart home technology is becoming essential, but buyers are also seeking technology that accounts for emotional and physical well-being and promotes wellness. Design and location are the most important factors to homebuyers, as more than half surveyed want better design from their new homes and are

moving due to life stage. Carmichael also advises builders to maximize their buyers’ personal time and convenience before, during, and after the home building project is underway.

TECHNOLOGY

Tech Adoption in Construction

The construction industry is often said to be slow to embrace technology. Small construction businesses, in particular, may be less rapid adopters compared with other industries.

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[MARKET UPDATE]

A new survey from Kabbage, a digital lender that offers lines of credit for small businesses, polled 400 small-business owners across several industries about integrating technology into workflow. The survey revealed that some builders lag behind other businesses.

When asked whether they plan to invest in technologies to remove manual processes, reduce paperwork, and amp up productivity, about half of surveyed builders said yes, a lower than average response compared with other small-business owners. Builders also trailed other small businesses in terms of investing in cybersecurity to protect their company and customer data—also lower than all business owners surveyed.

Mobile technologies, such as apps and mobile advertising, were less popular



among construction business owners than others, as 34 percent said they plan to make such an investment. Of all the owners surveyed, more than half said they plan to invest in mobile technologies. The least popular tech strategy among construction business owners was real-time digital analytics, or “big data” solutions. Just 23 percent said they would invest in such technology.

Victoria Treyger, Kabbage’s chief revenue officer, notes that the trend

is telling in light of current U.S. labor shortages. Kabbage conducted the survey to gain insight into business investment outlooks for 2018, including how business owners intend to invest in growth strategies.

CORRECTION

In the Kitchen and Bath Trends 2018 feature in *Professional Builder’s* April issue, page 46, one designer’s first name and affiliation was inadvertently omitted. Angela Harris, principal and creative director of Trio Environments, in Denver and New York, noted the growing trend toward indoor-outdoor connection in bath design. **PB**

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