



Safety News

Dedicated to ensuring the safest and healthiest working environment for our members

Spring 2022 | Issue 22

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Our Vision

The United Association and its local unions will apply its best practices and resources to build the best educated and safest workforce in all sectors of the piping industry.

Message from Jennifer Massey Health, Safety and Environmental Administrator



Dear Brothers and Sisters:

As the season changes from winter to spring, there are changes happening here at the UA too, including my appointment as ITF Training Specialist, effective January 1, 2022. I am proudly serving as the Health, Safety and Environmental Administrator.

Here's a little more about me and what I bring to the organization: I earned a Bachelor of Arts in Applied Science of Occupational Health and Safety, with Concentrations in Fire Science and Industrial Hygiene Management from Columbia Southern University. In addition, I also hold many other safety and risk credentials (CSP, OHST, CHST, MLIS, CRIS, STS).

Before my appointment at the UA, I was the Corporate Safety & Health Director for a signatory contractor, Harder Mechanical. I have been a member of Plumbers and Pipe Fitters Local 290 in Tualatin, Oregon, since 2001. In 2009, I became an instructor at the Local 290 Training Center.

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Spring Topics

In this issue, we talk about change and growth on several fronts. As COVID-19 cases appear to be declining, policies and safety protocols are shifting. Your local and community may be seeing more people returning to work in offices and changes in mask mandates,

among other steps. We've shared some information about helping employees navigate the logistics and emotions tied to these shifts.

We're also addressing a tough but critical mental health topic—suicide—along with a look at issues and resources surrounding opioid impairment. Finally, I hope you'll be as enthusiastic as I am about the new injury prevention training course we're offering through ITP and the upcoming leadership training options from OSHA.

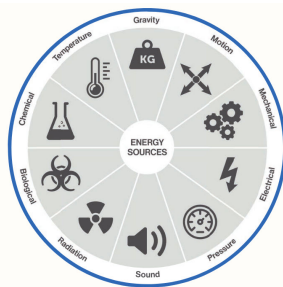
I have many ideas for expanding our training and safety programs and I look forward to hearing your thoughts as we move forward together. Please contact me at jmassey@uanet.org. ■

TRAINING

UA Instructor Training Program

New ITP Course Expands Skills for Hazard Recognition and Prevention

By Jennifer Massey, UA Health, Safety and Environmental Administrator, ITF Training Specialist



I am excited to introduce the Energy-Based Hazard Recognition course at ITP for many reasons, but mainly because I have seen the need for it in the field and believe in the science behind it. While participating in investigations over the years, I have observed that in almost all cases the accident or incident happened because of an unidentified hazard. Through this course, we learn more about how we identify potential problems and ways to improve our skills. I encourage all of us to keep seeking safety success and do our part to prevent injuries.

Course overview

After engaging in a few activities and mental games, participants will become aware of some common strengths and limitations in hazard recognition. The instructor will introduce the "energy wheel" and demonstrate a variety of options for integrating energy-based hazard recognition skills into the workplace. These techniques and tools, developed through research and practical application, equip participants to consistently assess and reliably increase hazard recognition skill by an average of 30%.

Background

Although recognizing hazards is a fundamental skill for injury prevention technique, research shows that workers across industries identify and discuss fewer than half of the hazards that they will face during a work period. This is not because

of complacency or lack of effort. Rather, we all have systematic blind spots that mean we see some hazards easily by instinct, while others require more complex problem-solving and go unnoticed. Fortunately, a series of published research studies have shown that by learning about several distinct forms of energy, including elements and forces found in nature and those harnessed by humans, workers can be trained to see and discuss a wider array of hazards more easily. ■

2022 OSHA Outreach Training Update

Upcoming Outreach Trainer Courses

OSHA 510 Course 2150

OSHA Standards for the Construction Industry

(prerequisite for OSHA 500)

Ann Arbor, Michigan

August 8-11, 2022 GLRTC

This date enables participants to be eligible for OSHA 500 during ITP week.

OSHA 510 Course 2150

OSHA Standards for the Construction Industry

(prerequisite for OSHA 500)

Ann Arbor, Michigan

October 3-6, 2022 GLRTC

OSHA 500 Course 2151

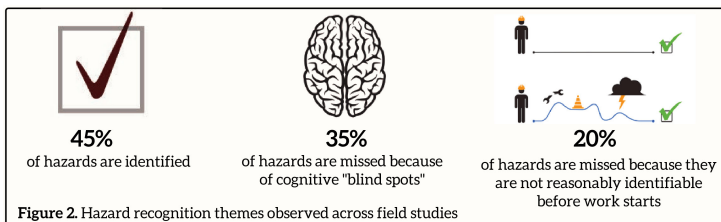
OSHA Standards for the Construction Industry

(OSHA 510 is a prerequisite)

Ann Arbor, Michigan

November 14-18, 2022 GLRTC

Registration is open and spaces are limited. Reserve your spot today.



HEALTH AT WORK

Managing Return to Work Stress

For some people, returning to the workplace can't come soon enough—they look forward to more social interaction with peers and getting away from distractions in their home setting. Others are dreading it, possibly anxious about being in close contact with groups of people again, too many distractions, and COVID-19 exposure. Companies can help with this transition in a number of ways that respect employee and supervisor needs while managing anxiety.

The Safe Actions for Employee Returns (SAFER) initiative developed by the National Safety Council offers suggestions for managing this new workplace reality. Following is an overview, and you can learn much more on the [NSC website](#).

Educate Employees and Supervisors

- Clearly communicate timelines, decision-making processes and expectations.
- Prepare education tools, courses, resource lists, and communications on stress management and mental health that are easy to access.
- Offer specific training to help supervisors recognize and support employees experiencing mental health distress or trouble adjusting to the in-person workplace.

Prepare the Workplace

- Align policies and procedures to accommodate employee needs and reflect organizational values.
- Develop a COVID-19 exposure control plan with employee input and let them know about it frequently.
- Create multiple channels for employee support and feedback.

Create an Environment of Respect

- Involve employees and supervisors in decision-making; frequently ask for feedback.
- Adjust expectations during the return to work adjustment period.
- Communicate employee mental health benefits and encourage wellness at home and work.

Thoughtful planning with help from some of these resources from the NSC, plus clear communication and an abundance of patience will help ease the transition back to the workplace. ■

Working Together to Prevent Suicide

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and this year the UA is focusing on a serious topic that affects people year-round: suicide. The pandemic and other global events have increased stress and magnified risk factors contributing to suicide and behavioral health issues. We understand that this is a difficult topic, but it is important to talk openly about warning signs and provide tools and resources for those who want to help but are unsure how. Together we can raise awareness and normalize conversations about the suicide crisis in the construction industry. In addition to this overview of the topic, we've included information about our own training resources, and links to a range of ways to learn more suicide prevention and mental health. We have also listed invaluable crisis contact information.

A Crisis in Our Industry

According to the Centers for Disease Prevention, the construction industry has the highest risk of suicide, as well as the most suicides across all occupational groups. We urgently need to incorporate this topic into our industry health and safety training.

Did you know?

- The suicide rate in construction is 53.2 per 100,000 workers, which is four times greater than the national average and five times greater than that of all other construction fatalities combined.
- Men in their early 20s through their 50s account for the bulk of suicides
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for those below age 35, and the fourth among ages 45-54

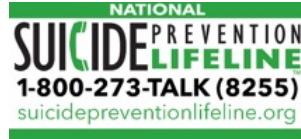
Know the Warning Signs

While people who are at risk of suicide may try to reach out to others, they rarely volunteer outright that they are thinking of harming themselves. It is important to look for warning signs, such as:

- Inattention to physical appearance or daily tasks
- Increased drug/alcohol use or risky behavior
- Problems with school or work performance
- Statements about feeling hopeless, worthless or burdensome
- Obsession with suicidal means
- Getting affairs in order, giving things away, saying goodbye

Know Some Ways to Help

It's really important to know what to do when you think someone is facing a suicidal or mental health crisis. Here are a few crisis lines that you can use for a referral or call yourself.



Build a safe culture.

A positive work environment that values mental health should include an emphasis on safety and teamwork along with access to insurance and mental health care. Elements can include an Employee Assistance Program, training that builds skills for problem solving and conflict resolution without violence, and a culture that encourages connection between employees, family and community.

Keep on learning.

The UA has prepared Tool Box Talks that can help supervisors and managers practice difficult conversations, including suicide intervention and prevention. We've included a sample practice conversation below, but for more Talks and other resources, such as Coping Cards, email Training@uavip.org.

The Conversation: What should you say if you are worried someone might be suicidal?

First: "I've noticed _____ (list specific behaviors), and I am concerned."

Second: "Given what you've been going through, it would be understandable if you were thinking about suicide. I am wondering if this is true for you."

Third: "Tell me more about your thoughts of suicide and your distress." [LISTEN]

Fourth: "Thank you for trusting me. I am on your team: you are not alone. I have some ideas that might help."

Fifth: Suggest resources:

- 1-800-273-8255 (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline)
- Employee Assistance Program
- Man Therapy.org
- Other local mental health resources

Simple intervention conversations like these can save lives and help protect your coworkers, friends, and family members. You can't fix mental health with duct tape, but you can connect with people to help them find solutions that work.

For additional leadership and supervisory training:

QPR Institute (www.qprinstitute.com)

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (www.livingworks.net)

University of Colorado (<https://www.coloradodepressioncenter.org/workingminds/>)

Resources

Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention (www.preventconstructionsuicide.com)

Suicide Prevention Resource Center (www.SPRC.org)

American Association of Suicidology (www.suicidology.org)

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (www.AFSP.org)

Center for Workplace Mental Health (www.workplacemental-health.org)

Man Therapy (www.mantherapy.org)

Mental Health America (www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

National Alliance on Mental Health (www.nami.org)

National Institute of Mental Health (www.nimh.nih.gov)

Screening for Mental Health (www.mentalhealthscreening.org)

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (www.SAVE.org)

We're all part of the solution.

There is a good chance you have been touched by suicide in some way, whether within your own family or among colleagues, friends or acquaintances. It takes courage to step in and speak up for mental health awareness and suicide prevention. Education is the key to feeling safe when asking for and giving help. The risk and price of doing nothing is unacceptable. ■

The Opioid Crisis: An Industry Wake-Up Call

Drug overdose is the number one cause of unintentional death in the U.S. The Center for Disease Control's most recent data reports that more than 100,000 people died by drug overdose between April 2020 and April 2021, a new record that is a 28.5% increase from the previous year. More than 70% of these deaths were due to opioids. Even more shocking is that opioid overdose deaths have increased more than 457% since 1999. The Canadian Institute for Health also reports significant increases: [6,946 opioid-related deaths occurred \(between April 2020 to March 2021\)](#), which is an 88 percent increase from the year prior to the pandemic (April 2019 to March 2020). Recent reports indicate that COVID-19 may be contributing to an increase in substance abuse as well.

A Construction Industry Challenge

This tragic reality is hitting our industry hard. It makes sense that occupations in which workers experience more physical strains and injuries are more likely than others to misuse prescription opioids or become addicted. Construction workers have one of the highest rates of substance abuse, which plays out in other statistics like absenteeism, health care costs, job turnover and disability time.

In an employer survey, the National Safety Council found that 90% of employers say they are concerned about all forms of impairment in the workplaces. Over half of the respondents said impairment is decreasing the safety of their workforce. This should be a wake-up call to all of us—and especially those of us who have safety in our job responsibilities.

Supervisor Training

What these numbers don't illustrate is the toll on people at work and at home. How do employers and supervisors support employee well-being and business realities? Supervisor training is key to keeping workers healthy and safe. One place to start is NSC's e-Learning course, [Impairment Recognition and Response Training for Supervisors](#).

An [NSC survey focused on opioids](#) in the workplace found that while 75% of employers have been directly impacted by employee opioid misuse, only 17% feel very confident that they can address the problem effectively. The one-hour NSC course equips supervisors and safety professionals to recognize and respond to perceived impairment in the workplace. Participants learn practical information that they can use in their daily work along with gaining more insight into causes, symptoms, prevention and legal considerations. More information and registration [here](#).

Opioids at Work Toolkit

Training is the most effective way to prepare supervisors and other employees to address substance abuse at work, but only 28% of employers offer opioid-specific education to their workforce. One readily available resource is this free [Opioids at Work employer toolkit](#). It contains sample policies, fact sheets, presentations, 5-minute safety talks, posters, white papers, reports, videos and more so you can understand the issues, educate others, support affected employees, and implement an opioid workplace program.

The NSC offers additional workplace impairment information and resources [here](#).

Take Action Now

As our world grapples with a global pandemic and other unsettling issues, the stress takes its toll on employees. The workplace should be a place where they feel safe to do their jobs, and also to find help when they need it. The UA is here to help our members create a positive work environment, so please contact us for information, ideas and support. ■

MEETINGS, EVENTS AND OBSERVANCES

Upcoming Dates to Remember

April, Distracted Driving Awareness Month

<https://www.nsc.org/road/distracted-driving-awareness-month>

April 28, 2022 Workers Memorial Day

<https://nationaltoday.com/workers-memorial-day/>

May, Mental Health Month

May 2-6, Construction Safety Week

<https://www.constructionsafetyweek.com>

May 2-6, National Safety Stand-Down to prevent falls in construction

<https://www.osha.gov/stop-falls-stand-down>

May 19-22, National Safety Council (NSC) Division Spring Meetings, Labor Division, Tempe, AZ

<https://www.nsc.org/divisions>

June 6-8, Women in the Mechanical Industry Conference, Austin, TX, for networking, education and inspiration. Registration open in April.

<https://www.mcaa.org/initiatives/women-in-the-mechanical-industry-initiative/>

— MAY IS —

Mental Health

— AWARENESS MONTH —