Suicide Prevention Is a Safety & Health Priority

BY STUART BINSTOCK, PRESIDENT & CEO

Risk management is about assessing and avoiding risks that could adversely affect your business. To that end, contractors spend a great deal of time focused on physical safety prevention – especially OSHA’s fatal four hazards: electrical, fall, struck-by, and caught-in or -between.

However, an often overlooked yet serious risk management issue is your employees’ mental health and risk of suicide. The mental well-being of your company’s workforce is equally as important as their physical well-being. If they are struggling with mental health issues, then they may ignore all of your efforts to protect them and could be a danger to themselves and others.

This is why CFMA has been deeply involved in suicide prevention for the past four years. Since the Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention (CIASP) started as a CFMA task force in 2016, it has garnered support from contractors, unions, associations, and mental health organizations across the country. In 2018, the CIASP became a separate 501(c)(3) organization with its own governing body. And, in July 2019, the CIASP hired an association management company to handle its day-to-day operations – a major step in transitioning to an independent organization.

The CIASP provides and disseminates information, resources, and training for suicide prevention and mental health promotion in construction to create a zero-suicide industry. The CIASP’s strategic goals are to: 1) Create awareness in the construction industry for addressing suicide prevention as a health and safety priority, 2) Build a toolkit for contractors to be able to implement suicide prevention in the workplace, 3) Create a sustainable funding strategy, and 4) Develop a solid structure to deliver on its mission.

It’s important to understand the limitations of what the CIASP is trying to achieve. We are trying to create awareness so that company leaders and fellow employees can identify individuals who are at risk of suicide or who are exhibiting warning signs, and refer them to mental health professionals; we are not trying to transform company leaders or employees into mental health professionals.

Last month, the CIASP relaunched www.preventconstructionsuicide.com as a resource for those in construction to get help, get informed, and get involved with suicide prevention. In conjunction with this independent website, the CIASP has created a new model for our industry to follow: STAND up for suicide prevention.

With more construction workers dying by suicide each day than by all other workplace-related fatalities combined, now is the time for the industry to STAND up for suicide prevention and address it as a health and safety priority. Join CFMA in taking the pledge to create Safe cultures, provide Training to identify and help those at risk, raise Awareness about the suicide crisis in construction, Normalize conversations around suicide and mental health, and ultimately Decrease the risks associated with suicide in construction.

As CFMA remains committed to suicide prevention, we recently created CFMA’s Suicide Prevention Committee to encourage chapter summits and other events at the local level as well as to keep the conversation going within our chapters and among our members.

I’m often asked how a bunch of accountants got involved in the issue of suicide prevention. Quite simply, there was a void in the industry and it needed to be filled. Every CFMA member should be proud of our Association’s industry-wide leadership.