

MEMBER NEWS: SUPPORTING WORKPLACE RECOVERY

An Interview with OSHA's Timothy S. Irving



Timothy S. Irving
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Before Timothy “Tim” Irving assumed the position of Deputy Director for OSHA’s Directorate of Construction (DOC), he was co-owner of a small electrical contracting business. As a small business owner, he fondly described his employees as more like “friends and family.” Following an electrical explosion that put two of his employees in the hospital, Irving decided to go into safety full-time with the goal of helping small businesses.

Having been actively involved with the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention \(AFSP\)](#) for many years, Irving found suicide and substance use disorders draw similar parallels in the mental health space. This inevitably led him down the path of mental health awareness, launching new initiatives like workplace supported recovery and recovery friendly workplace programs.

While looking deeper into substance use disorder and its impact on the industry, he found himself shocked by the statistics: since 2015 overdose deaths have increased by 35 percent. In just the last seven years, occupational deaths by overdose have increased at least 25 percent each year. In 2019, there were a reported 313 occupational fatalities related to substance abuse disorder – that is almost six percent of **ALL** occupational fatalities.

TAKING ACTION, BUILDING TRADES RECOVERY WEEK

In 2019, Irving participated as a speaker for BTEA Northeast’s inaugural Building Trades Recovery Week. His participation gave OSHA the platform needed to get involved and connect the Agency’s mission of preventing injuries, illnesses and fatalities in the workplace. As a portion of these fatalities occur in the workplace, Recovery Week became the perfect vehicle for getting the word out to the industry.

The valuable partnership between OSHA and BTEA Northeast allows the Agency to stay current on industry issues. Irving describes BTEA Northeast as the “catalyst” to raising awareness of substance use disorders. 2019 Recovery Week showed the industry there is a need and space to talk about this topic. This need has led OSHA to develop alliances, most notably with New Hampshire’s Office for Recovery Friendly Workplace, with the prospect of creating new alliances in the future.

“One of the directions OSHA is going in is to support worker recovery and make businesses aware that there are programs out there to help them with workers in recovery.” Irving continued, “Many businesses are not familiar with the community, plus, there is a huge stigma at play and this crisis affects everyone – from D-1 athletes, mothers to other business owners.”

RESOURCES TO CONSIDER

The Opioid Epidemic and substance use disorders are complicated as they involve overlapping situations in both the workplace and outside. These non-traditional conditions present a serious public and occupational health problem impacting individuals, families, work environments and communities.

OSHA looks to its partners for expertise in research and can trust the material and information provided:

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#)
[The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health \(NIOSH\)](#)

Both organizations have multiple resources for Total Worker Health addressing issues such as Traumatic Incident Stress, substance use disorder, suicide and much more.

The [National Safety Council](#) has the “Safe Actions for Employee Returns,” which is a multifaceted and comprehensive effort aimed at helping employers prioritize safety as they return employees to traditional work environments and schedules in a post-quarantine world.

The [Center for Construction Research and Training](#) has published a Mental Health and Addiction website with handouts, planning tools & training programs.
