

A surge in SUICIDES

Addressing **mental health issues** on the job is the new imperative

By CAL BEYER and BOB VANDEPOL

Recent data highlights a surge in suicide rates in the United States to its highest levels in decades. According to the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention, the overall suicide rate rose by 24 percent between 1999 and 2014. Suicide deaths increased from 29,199 in 1999 to 42,773 in 2014. Suicide rates for men and women aged 45-64 increased by 43 percent and 63 percent, respectively. Men still account for almost 80 percent of the total number of suicides in the United States.

Business case for addressing mental health

Behavioral health disorders are of similar magnitude to physical disorders such as diabetes and heart disease. Statistics shared by Screening for Mental Health, Inc. include:

- ☛ Depression is estimated to cause 200 million lost workdays each year at a cost to employers of \$17 to \$44 billion.
- ☛ In a three-month period, individuals with depression miss an average of 4.8 workdays and suffer 11.5 days of reduced productivity.
- ☛ Research suggests that 60-80 percent of individuals with mental health disorders will improve with early treatment
- ☛ 78 percent of employees experiencing psychological distress are not receiving treatment
- ☛ Of adults with both a mental health and substance use disorder, only 7.9 percent receive treatment for both conditions, and more than half receive no treatment at all.

Why are these facts so important?

According to Suicide Awareness Voices for Education (SAVE), it's estimated that more than 90 percent of individuals who die by suicide were experiencing a diagnosable mental illness at the time of their death. Addressing mental health and suicide prevention in safety, health, wellness and employee benefit programs is an imperative.

Construction industry takes the lead

The Carson J. Spencer Foundation in Denver and the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention collaborated with a national mechanical contractor in Denver known as RK to publish a *Construction Industry Blueprint for Suicide Prevention* in September of 2015. (This resource is downloadable at www.carsonjspencer.org).

Dr. Sally Spencer-Thomas, CEO of the Carson J. Spencer Foundation, and Cal Beyer, director of Risk Management for Lakeside Industries (Issaquah, WA) are two of the three Co-Leads of the Workplace Task Force for the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention and they have been spearheading a construction industry initiative on mental health and suicide prevention.

The Construction Financial Management Association (www.cfma.org) Valley of the Sun Chapter in Phoenix hosted the first construction industry suicide prevention regional summit in the United States on April 7, 2016. One of the leaders of this summit is Michelle Walker, the vice president of finance & administration for

LESS GLOVE & MORE PROTECTION
ELIMINATE & REDUCE CUT INJURIES WITH...



Dyneema® Diamond Technology fiber makes possible higher levels of cut protection with enhanced dexterity. This unique fiber enables gloves and sleeves to be ultrathin and inherently cool to the touch. Look for the Dyneema® Diamond Technology tag to ensure the most innovative fibers.

We Protect People with Gloves, Glasses and Garments. We are MCR Safety.

www.mcrcsafety.com

800-955-6887



Scan the QR code to learn more.

Specialized Services Company, a boring company in Phoenix. Walker explained why this summit was scheduled: "I work in an industry full of men facing many of the risk factors for suicide, and I see my role in removing the shame around encouraging our employees to seek help for mental illness."

Walker sees "the positive effect that focusing on physical fitness can have on personal satisfaction, work performance and safety. I use company meetings to educate employees on the importance of wearing sunscreen, good nutrition and hydration to help with heat-related illness, stretch and flex to prevent injuries... the list goes on." As for mental wellness, Walker wants "to normalize the topic, to make going to a therapist as acceptable as going to the dermatologist. To create this caring culture, we must make our employees feel comfortable in recognizing and sharing their mental health struggles, and equip them with the resources to help themselves and others."

Multi-industry response

Robert Turner, the Private Sector Co-Lead for the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention is a retired executive from Union Pacific, which is also represented on the Executive Committee for the Action Alliance by Mark Jones, director of employee assistance programs.

Union Pacific Railroad is hosting a suicide prevention summit in Omaha, Nebraska, on August 24, 2016. Beyer will share actions being taken in the construction industry. Spencer-Thomas has previously collaborated with Union Pacific's Jones and the transportation sector's International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART union) on peer-to-peer counseling and other mental health initiatives.

Skip Parry, vice president, safety and risk management for pipeline contractor Otis Eastern Service, LLC (Wellsville, NY) says, "We are certainly in interesting times with work/life balance and have to be mindful of the traveling worker all the time. Mental health issues in the construction industry and in the oil and gas arena are slow to surface. Typically these things are internalized and seldom shared, but if one looks and listens closely the undercurrent is there. We have been coaching our field management personnel to remain open to these possibilities. There is more going on at times than some folks realize. Management team members showing a little awareness on this front goes a long way."

President & CEO Dan Pienta of Automatic Handling International, Erie, Michigan, describes the culture shift driven by his company's focus on people and human capital. "This focus helps us move away from traditional management to a style that is full of compassion, acceptance, kindness, and empathy. We call this CAKE. Our goal is to change how we look at our relationships with our colleagues and to truly understand where they are and help them grow in their life journey," he says.

"Getting to really know the people you work with will have an impact in understanding and helping people who are depressed or have some form of mental illness. Every person is worth saving."

Conclusion

Proactively addressing mental health and suicide prevention is a matter of life or death like other mission critical safety and health challenges. Suicide is preventable -- but only if the underlying life issues and associated mental health concerns can be identified and addressed. Awareness and commitment among company leaders is essential to incorporate mental health and suicide prevention into existing human

Cited and Additional Resources:

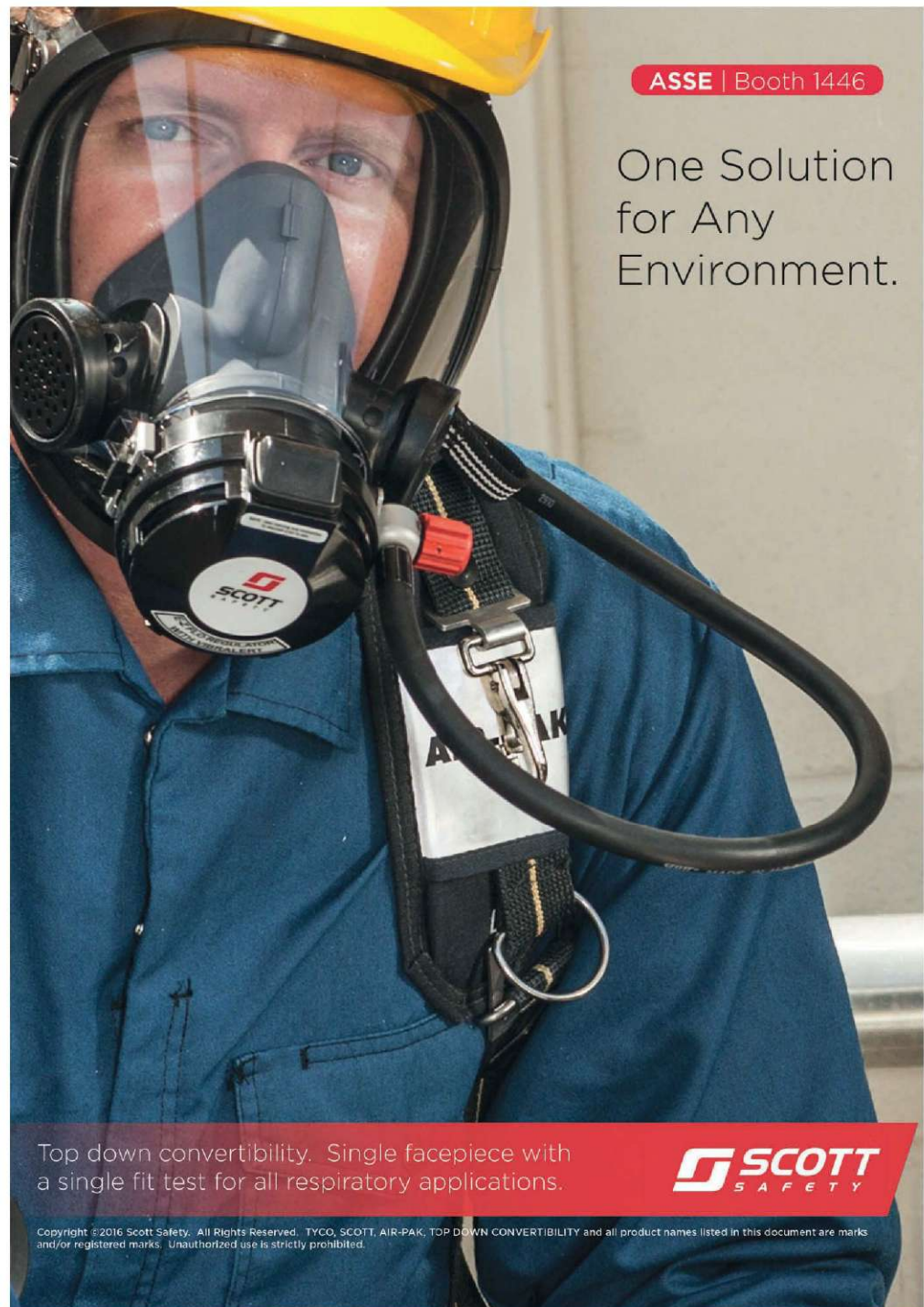
1. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (<https://afsp.org/>)
2. Carson J. Spencer Foundation (www.CarsonJSpencer.org)
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/>)
4. Man Therapy (www.mantherapy.org)
5. National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (<http://actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/>)
6. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>)
7. Partnership for Workplace Mental Health (<http://www.workplacementalhealth.org/>)
8. Suicide Awareness Voices for Education (SAVE) (<http://www.save.org/>)
9. Screening for Mental Health, Inc. (<https://mentalhealthscreening.org/>) and for anonymous Screening tools: <http://helpyourselfhelpothers.org/>
10. Working Minds (www.WorkingMinds.org)

resources, benefits and safety programs. **ISHN**

Cal Beyer is the Director of Risk Management for Lakeside Industries in Issaquah, WA. He has 28 years of experience in safety and risk management. Cal can be reached at cal.beyer@lakeside

deindustries.com or 425/313-2611.

Bob VandePol serves as Director of Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services' Employee Assistance Program. He can be reached at bob.vandepol@pinerest.org or 616/258-7548.



ASSE | Booth 1446

One Solution
for Any
Environment.

Top down convertibility. Single facepiece with a single fit test for all respiratory applications.

SCOTT SAFETY

Copyright ©2016 Scott Safety. All Rights Reserved. TYCO, SCOTT, AIR-PAK, TOP DOWN CONVERTIBILITY and all product names listed in this document are marks and/or registered marks. Unauthorized use is strictly prohibited.

ISHN JUNE 2016 www.ishn.com