



5-minute safety talk

The Worst Drug Epidemic (It's Not What You Think)

More than 20 percent of the workforce has misused or abused prescription painkillers, according to *2014 Injury Facts*[®], the statistical report on unintentional injuries by the National Safety Council. Could someone in your organization be among them?

How big is the problem? NSC research points to the following statistics:

- Unintentional drug overdoses contribute to more deaths per year than motor vehicle crashes.
- Since 1999, the number of deaths involving prescription drug overdose has quadrupled.
- More than 43,982 people died in drug overdoses in 2013, 52 percent of them from misuse of prescription drugs.
- Forty-five people die every day from overdose of prescription pain medication. That's twice the number of people who die from cocaine and heroin abuse, combined.
- Some 12 million Americans admitted to using prescription painkillers for non-medical purposes in 2010.
- In 2011, more than 400,000 emergency room visits were related to prescription painkillers.
- Nonmedical use of prescription painkillers costs society up to \$55.7 billion annually.
- Prescription drugs account for 25 percent of workers compensation medical costs.
- Injured workers receiving opioid pain killers have 4.7 times as many days off.

It Doesn't Start Out As a Problem

People don't just wake up one day and decide to abuse drugs. Many are hard workers who were prescribed painkillers after an injury. However, due to the highly addictive nature of opioids, an employee might quickly develop a dependence on the drug, leading to a greater risk of overdose and a desire for stronger drugs. In fact, four out of five new heroin users report starting on prescription painkillers, according to NSC research.

EXAMPLES OF OPIOID CONTAINING MEDICINES		
	Generic	Brand Name
SHORT-ACTING	morphine	MSIR, Roxanol
	oxycodone	OxyIR, Oxyfast, Endocodone
	oxycodone (with acetaminophen)	Roxilox, Roxicet, Percocet, Tylox, Endocet
	hydrocodone (with acetaminophen)	Vicodin, Lorcet, Lortab, Zydone, Hydrocet, Norco
	hydromorphone	Dilaudid, Hydrostat
LONG-ACTING	morphine	MSContin, Oramorph SR, Kadian, Avinza
	oxycodone	Oxycontin
	fentanyl	Duragesic patch

If you see someone showing signs of an overdose, like slow and loud breathing, sleepiness, stupor, floppy muscles, clammy skin, pinpoint pupils, slow heart rate and low blood pressure, call 911 immediately and be prepared to perform CPR. Naloxone is an antidote that can be administered immediately, if available.

Painkillers Don't Always Come From a Doctor

Experts believe prescription painkillers are being overprescribed by doctors even though alternatives, such as ibuprofen or naproxen, often work just as well. Changing prescriber behavior is just one part of a major NSC initiative to reduce prescription painkiller abuse.

But here's an eye-opener: Nearly 70 percent of people abusing prescription painkillers in 2013 said they got the drugs from a friend or relative.

Sometimes friends share their drugs in a misguided attempt to help. This is illegal and highly dangerous, as there is no way to know how a particular drug will react from one individual to another.

Sometimes a drug abuser may go to greater lengths, taking drugs out of the medicine cabinets, purses or cars of the people who trust and love them.

Never share your prescriptions, and lock up and properly dispose of them when no longer needed. Here are a few tips on keeping prescription drugs out of the wrong hands:

- Keep medicine out of sight of children and visitors.
- Use a locking medicine cabinet or safe.
- Return medication to your secure location after every use.
- Avoid leaving medication or pill containers on countertops, tables or nightstands.
- Do not keep pills in your purse, luggage or office drawer. Locking travel cases are available to carry prescription medicines.
- Take old pills to take-back events or collection boxes. (Do not flush down the toilet or pour into drains as this can pollute water supplies and may be illegal in your state.)

NSC is Confronting the Epidemic

On a national level, NSC is supporting efforts to reduce prescription painkiller misuse through prescription drug monitoring programs that identify which drugs are being abused. NSC also is working to educate employers, prescribers and patients, and advocates for stronger national and state laws to reduce doctor shopping and "pill mills," medical offices that provide little care but dispense large quantities of pharmaceuticals.

What Can Employers Do?

Workers prescribed painkillers are at greater risk for addiction and overdose. Employers are encouraged to educate employees about the hazards associated with prescription painkillers, and workplace policy should address medical and nonmedical use of painkillers.

Employers should actively promote their employee assistance programs to encourage workers who may have a problem to seek treatment. Research indicates that employer-supported and monitored treatment yields better sustained recovery rates than treatment initiated at the request of friends and family members.

