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# Construction Trades Council offers more tools to prevent, overcome substance use

Specialized training aimed at dealing with opioid and substance use in the workplace was launched recently by the Rhode Island Building & Construction Trades Council (RIBCTC).

The council and its signatory contractors are working with Building Futures and the Occupational and Environmental Health Center of Rhode Island to provide solutions to substance use in the construction industry with training called Opioids & Construction: Why It Matters and What You Can Do. That was announced at the fourth in a series of workshops – Opioids and Your Work Force – held at Local 51 of the

United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry of the United States and Canada in Riverside.

In a prepared statement emailed to Common Ground, Michael F. Sabitoni, president of the RIBCTC said: “For several years, the Rhode Island Building Trades and its partners have recognized the need to conduct seminars, provide in-depth discussions with experts and aggressively spearhead proactive programs to further educate our industry leadership and assist our members in getting the help and resources they need to overcome substance and opioid misuse.

“The series of workshops are just one way in which we have been finding solutions to the opioid crises,” he said. “Other successful initiatives include member assistance programs and employee assistance programs so individuals can confidentially address mental health issues they are facing, including addiction. We are also aggressively working with health care providers to educate members and caregivers of other alternatives to opioid pain medication. Those of us in organized labor agree that a cultural shift is needed so that people feel they can ask for help and take time off without worrying they will be stigmatized, judged, or even lose their job.”

Vice President Rhode Island Business Unit Leader John Sinnott, who works for the Gilbane Building Company, a signatory contractor, states: “Construction is inherently fast paced and results driven, with work completed under tight deadlines. Reconciling the business needs of our industry with the human needs of employees is paramount at Gilbane. This training seminar will further assist our business leaders in the field and those at all levels in our profession on how to address the issue and support those in need.”

According to the statement, the training will be given by Jill Sypole, a licensed clinical social worker and health initiatives manager at Building Futures. It was developed in consultation with community health, the Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals and industry leaders. The goal of the training is to give participants practical information to prevent opioid dependency and resources to approach recovery for themselves, a co-worker, or a loved one. The training also provides participants with hands on rescue training, including how to obtain and administer naloxone (Narcan) in the case of an overdose.

“With this program we can train individuals at every level in the industry, from union and industry leaders to apprentices and journey workers, to Building Futures’ pre-apprentices,” said Andrew Cortés, executive director of Building Futures. “Our goal is to get potentially lifesaving information into the hands of people who need it while generating the empathy necessary for leaders and co-workers to address problems of dependency in the field.”

Sabitoni also states, “Together we are finding solutions to help guide our highly-skilled craftsmen and women with any pressure they are facing, either on or off the job, in a healthy, private and meaningful way. We are proud of the work by Building Futures under the leadership of Andrew Cortés and look forward to the specialized training prepared by Ms. Sypole.”

*More information can be obtained by calling Sabitoni at (401) 331-9682.*