

MICHIGAN



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY: Prevention of work-related injuries & illnesses through research & investigation

SUICIDE IN THE WORKPLACE: PREVENTION OPPORTUNITIES

Hazard Alert Workplace Suicide Prevention 9/14/20

From 2001-2018, 196 Michigan workers died due to a self-inflicted injury while at work. Over the 18 years, work-related suicides were the cause of 7.8% of all work-related deaths and the 6th leading cause of death (Figure 1), although in 2011 and 2013, they were the third leading cause of death.

Figure 1. Work-Related Death by Cause, Michigan, 2001-2018

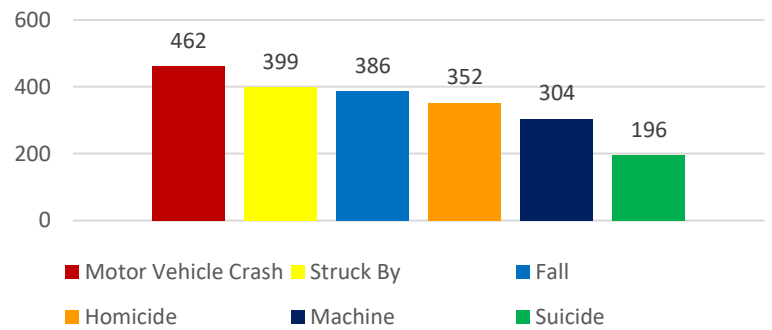
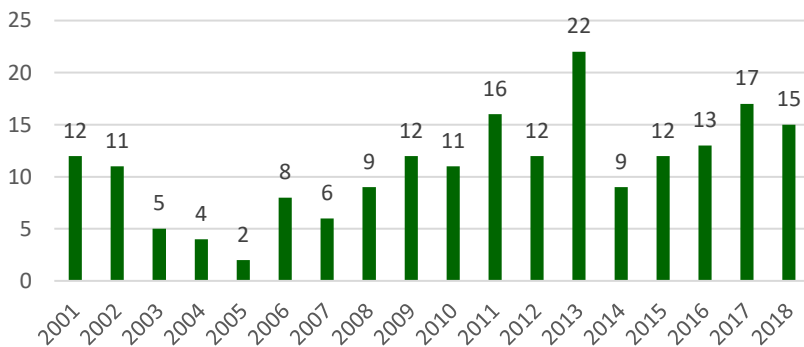


Figure 2. Workplace Suicides by Year, Michigan, 2001-2018



From 2001-2018, the largest number of work-related suicides occurred in Manufacturing and Agriculture; each had 24 suicide deaths, then Retail Trade with 22, Construction with 21 and Other Services with 19 deaths. Figure 2 shows work-related suicides by year.

Of the 196 suicide deaths, 34.7% were the owner of the business.

A self-inflicted gunshot wound was the most common method of a work-related suicide (104 deaths, 53.0%), followed by asphyxiation, which included hanging and chemical asphyxiation (74 deaths, 37.8%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Suicide Method, Michigan 2001-2018

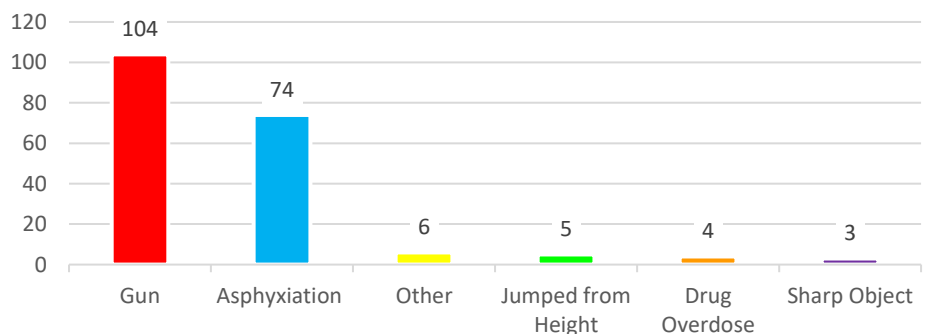
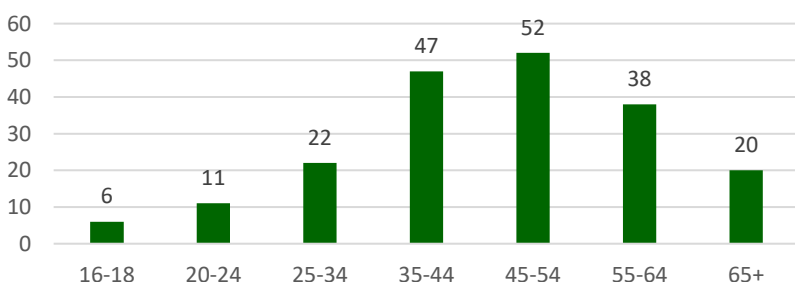


Figure 4. Work-related Suicide Age Distribution, Michigan 2001-2018



Suicides occurred most frequently among individuals ages 45-54 (52 deaths, 26.5%), followed by individuals aged 35-44 (47 deaths, 24.0%), then 55-64 (38 deaths, 19.4%) (Figure 4). The average age of death in Retail Trade was 36.6 years, which was younger than the average in other top industries, which were in the 45-54 age range.

PREVENTING WORK-RELATED SUICIDES

Psychological health and safety should be an integral part of all organizations. It is important that a work environment values its employees and their families, fosters communication, a sense of belonging, respect, encourages individuals to seek help when they need it and to support each other, and actively works to prevent harm to a worker's mental/psychological health. Employer efforts to create a psychologically healthy workplace should be integrated into an existing health and safety management plan. Workplaces with a positive approach to psychological health and safety are better able to recruit and retain talent, have improved employee engagement, enhanced productivity, are more creative and innovative, and have higher profit levels. Other positive impacts include a reduction of several key workplace issues including the risk of conflict, grievances, turnover, disability, injury rates, absenteeism and performance, or morale problems.

Key factors involved in creating a psychologically healthy workplace include:

- Civility and respect in the workplace
- Supported and valued employees
- Praise, recognition, acknowledgement and fairness
- Growth and development opportunities
- Clear leadership and expectations
- Recognition of the need for balance (personal life, family, work)
- Manageable workloads – responsibilities can be accomplished within the time available
- Adequate resources to do the job
- Input/control over work organization
- Consideration of opinions and suggestions of employees – employees participate in decision-making
- Psychological services and supports available to employees when mental health issues occur

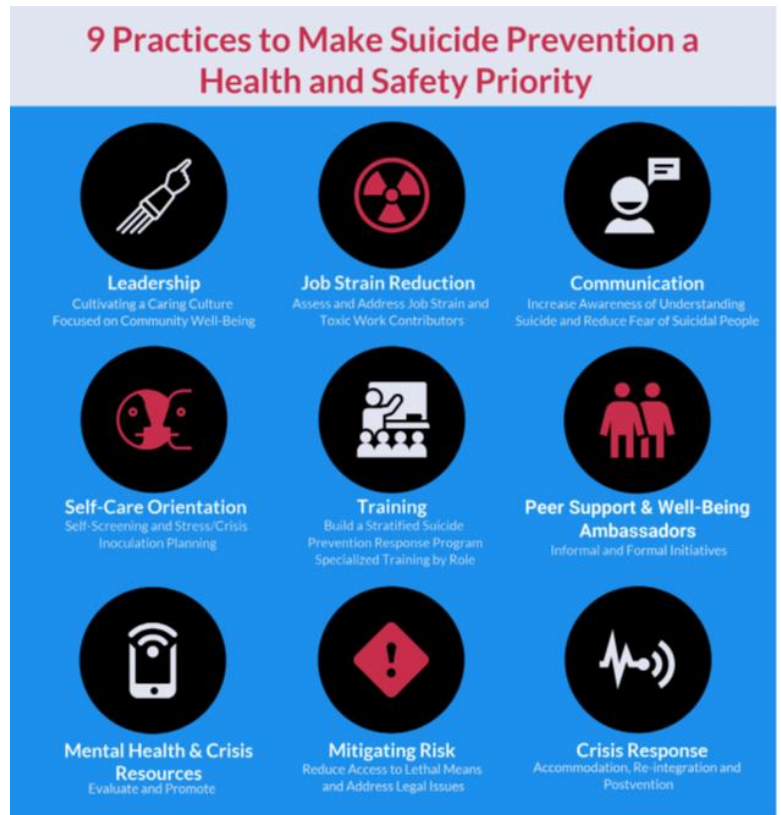


Key Strategies for Suicide Prevention:

- **Ensure commitment** of organizational leadership
 - View [On the agenda](#), a series of videos, presentation slides and supporting materials that can help trainers, team leaders, managers and others to pave the way for discussions and action aimed at developing a psychologically healthy and safe workplace
- **Establish a baseline** profile of the organization and **conduct a needs assessment**
- **Develop a policy statement** that outlines commitment to the development of a systematic approach for managing psychological health and safety in the workplace
 - “ABC company considers the mental health and psychological safety of its employees to be as important as other aspects of health and safety. ABC company is committed to supporting a mentally healthy workplace through appropriate policies, programs and services.”
- **Identify a workplace champion**
- **Understand factors that may increase suicide risk**
 - Demographic: gender, age, bereavement, sexual orientation and gender identity
 - Mental illness: (e.g., depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia)
 - Socio-economic status: by job, class, education, income or housing
 - Behavioral: (e.g., alcohol and substance dependence, eating and sleeping pattern changes)
 - Psychological and attitudinal: (e.g., perfectionism, over-thinking, feeling defeated, hopelessness, and feelings of not belonging and being a burden to others)
 - Changes in productivity: (e.g., deterioration in performance of work, lethargy in a previously energetic person new pattern of unexplained lateness or absences, recent inability to concentrate on work or to complete work)
 - Changes in social functioning

- Changes in personality or behavior: (e.g., mood swings, acting anxious or agitated, showing rage or uncontrolled anger, behaving recklessly)
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Signs of self-inflicted physical harm
- Job conditions: (e.g., lack of control over work tasks and decisions, monotonous/repetitive jobs, high psychological demands of work, imbalance between effort and reward)
- **Embed psychological health and safety into policies and processes** throughout the firm's departments and the employment lifecycle (e.g., recruiting, hiring, orientation, performance management, return to work, termination, etc. (See [Policy Recommendations](#) for specific examples of how to embed policies)

- **Provide training:** Information about factors in the workplace that contribute to psychological health and safety, and specifically how to reduce hazards and risks that potentially cause psychological harm and how to enhance factors that promote psychological health



- Managers: to help them recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health problems, provide initial help and refer employees who might have a mental health issue to appropriate help
- Employees: to help them understand the signs and symptoms of mental health problems and to learn mental health promotion practices, coping strategies, resiliency skills and how to get help when needed
- Specialized suicide awareness and prevention training for the appropriate individuals such as employee assistance program (EAP) providers and/or human resources staff
- **Promote awareness** of available employee benefits
- **Develop/implement return-to-work strategies** to help employees go back to work after being treated for a mental illness or problem
- **Develop/promote a mental health awareness campaign** in the workplace
 - Make mental health self-assessment tools available
 - Distribute materials, such as brochures, fliers, and videos, to all employees about the signs and symptoms of poor mental health and opportunities for treatment
 - Host seminars or workshops that address depression and stress management techniques, like mindfulness, breathing exercises, and meditation, to help employees reduce anxiety and stress and improve focus and motivation
- **Measure successes** (both in the short and long term)
- **Be aware of issues related to privacy and stigma** associated with mental health
- **Develop/implement a plan for responding to a suicide attempt or death**
 - Restrict access to locations and materials that could be used for suicide
 - Conduct a risk assessment and implement measures to restrict access
 - Include security measures when appropriate
 - Conduct frequent audits of hazardous stock or equipment
 - Carry out unannounced spot checks to ensure compliance with security protocols
- **Prevent and take action against bullying and harassment**
 - Implement a workplace policy which is communicated to all employees across the organization.
 - Maintain fair procedures for dealing promptly with complaints from employees. These procedures should have provision for confidentiality.
 - Let employees know that complaints of bullying and/or harassment or information from staff relating to such complaints will be dealt with fairly, confidentially and sensitively.

Did You Know?

- Nearly 35% of all workplace suicides in Michigan were owners of a business
 - Entrepreneurs may define themselves by the success of their business life
 - Rather than showing vulnerability, business owners may practice what is known as impression management-- "fake it till you make it."
- While self-reliance is often valued as a sign of strength and mental stability, it is also one of the strongest predictors of poor mental health and suicide risk
- In a three-month period, patients with depression miss an average of 4.8 workdays and suffer 11.5 days of reduced productivity
- More workers are absent from work because of stress and anxiety than because of injury or physical illness even including chronic conditions such as diabetes, asthma, and arthritis
- Canada has a voluntary standard titled: Psychological health and safety in the workplace - Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation ([CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013](#)) which provides guidance and resources, including implementation scenarios for small and large businesses

Resources

Suicide Resource Prevention Center:

- [A Report of Findings to Direct the Development of National Guidelines for Workplace Suicide Prevention](#)
- <https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/working-minds-suicide-prevention-workplace>
- <https://www.sprc.org/settings/workplaces>

Center for Workplace Mental Health:

- <http://workplacementalhealth.org/Mental-Health-Topics/Suicide-Prevention>
- <http://workplacementalhealth.org/Mental-Health-Topics/Suicide-Prevention/How-to-Effectively-Invest-In-Suicide-Prevention>

Working Minds: Suicide Prevention in the Construction Workplace:

<https://www.constructionworkingminds.org/>

NIOSH: [Suicide and Occupation](#)

CDC:

- [Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policies, Programs and Practices](#)
- [Mental Health in the Workplace Promotion Information](#)

OSHA: [Preventing Suicides](#) webpage

[Mental Health in the Workplace: A Call to Action](#) Proceedings from the Mental Health in the Workplace: Public Health Summit

Canada Life: [Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#)

Voluntary Protection Programs Participants' Association, Inc.: <https://www.vpppa.org/page-not-found/blog-entry/national-guidelines-for-workplace-suicide-prevention-take-the-pledge-to-make-suicide-prevention-a-health-and-safety-priority>

Owner/Entrepreneur Resources:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
- Preventing Startup Suicide. Literally. <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/271435>
- Discussion on Twitter [#StartUpMentalHealth](#)
- [Man Therapy](#): An on-line program using humor to engage men to cut through stigma and tackle issues like depression, divorce and anxiety
- **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:** <https://afsp.org/get-help>