

TOOLBOX TALK #16

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS AND COPD

Workers in construction trades are at “significantly” higher risk for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) than non-construction workers, according to the results of a recent study.

A team of researchers from the Center for Construction Research and Training (CPWR), Duke University and the University of Maryland studied nearly 18,000 participants in the Building Trades Medical Screening Program, or BTMed, to determine the risk of COPD among different trades. The study involved a larger cohort than a 2010 study of construction workers at U. S. Department of Energy nuclear facilities who participated in the BTMed. Those workers were found to have increased COPD risk, according to the CPWR.

Overall, 13.4% of the participants had COPD and more than 2/3 of the cases were classified as moderate to severe. Compared with non-construction workers, the participants had a 1.34 times greater risk of COPD and a 1.61 times higher risk of severe COPD. The trades with the highest level of risk were cement masons/bricklayers (2.36 times) and roofers (2.22 times).

Based on the new findings, the researchers say additional preventive measures are needed to reduce workplace exposures to vapors, gases, dusts and fumes to lower the risk of COPD.

