

**T**he headlines about opioids are inescapable—and so are the devastating, wide-ranging effects of these powerful pain-killing drugs. With overdose deaths and hospitalizations at levels never seen before, it seems that nowhere in American life is immune to the ravages of opioids, including the factory floor and the construction jobsite.

Meanwhile, more states are legalizing or decriminalizing marijuana, a drug that more than 8.4 million Americans smoke every day, according to a study from the British medical journal *Lancet Psychology*. While an October 2017 Gallup poll shows that 64 percent of Americans support legalization of pot, there's not nearly the same consensus regarding its use in the workplace. Many aspects of marijuana legalization still need to be cleared up by legislatures and the courts.

Both trends are affecting door and window companies across the nation at a time when the industry is struggling to find and keep workers.

### Drugs and the Lack of Workers

While statistics specific to the fenestration industry are hard to come by, new research indicates that opioids might be a major driver behind the nationwide shortage of skilled workers in many blue-collar segments of the economy.

A recent study by Princeton University's Alan Krueger suggests that the national increase in opioid prescriptions from 1999 to 2015 could account for about 20 percent of the decline in men in the workforce and 25 percent of the decline in women's labor force participation. While other factors such as an aging population play a role as well, an increase in opioid prescription rates "undoubtedly compounds the problem as many people who are out of the labor force find it difficult to return to work because of reliance on pain medication," according to a report on the study from the Brookings Institution.

"Labor force participation fell more in counties where more opioids were prescribed, controlling for the area's share of manufacturing employ-

ment and individual characteristics," Krueger writes in his report.

Krueger's earlier research found that nearly half of prime-age men who are not in the labor force take pain medication every day. Two-thirds of those men—or about 2 million—have prescriptions for their pain medications.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. labor force participation rate peaked at 67.3 percent in early 2000, and it reached a near 40-year low of 62.4 percent in September 2015.

In addition to draining the pool of available workers, drug use also costs companies a lot of money. According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD), drug abuse costs employers around \$81 billion each year from high turnover rates, reduced productivity, theft and absenteeism.

Perhaps even more shocking is the increase in the number of deaths at the workplace that are linked to drugs. Overdose deaths from the non-medical use of drugs or alcohol while on the job increased from 165 in 2015 to 217 in 2016, according to the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. That's a 32-percent increase. Overdose fatalities have increased by at least 25 percent annually since 2012.

### Companies on the Front Lines

Two major players in the door and window industry have found that drug testing can help screen out potential addiction problems in regions that are especially hard hit by the opioid crisis.

Veka, one of the world's biggest designers and extruders of vinyl window and patio door profiles, has its North American headquarters in Beaver County, Pa., north of Pittsburgh. Opioid overdose hospitalization rates in Beaver County jumped 159 percent between 2014 and 2016, according to a June 2017 report from the Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council.

Beaver County had the state's fourth-highest rate in 2016 and the highest in western Pennsylvania, with

40.2 hospital admissions per 100,000 residents.

Despite that, officials at Veka say opioids don't appear to be a major issue among its workforce—though one official at the company acknowledges that the epidemic could be depleting its pool of potential employees.

Kevin Seiling, the company's vice president of engineering, says Veka's tough pre-employment drug screening policy eliminates many potential problems. Job seekers have to click "agree" to the following statement before they can even begin to fill out an application on Veka's website: "A safe environment for our employees begins by providing a pre-employment 'Hair Test' (checking for drug history over the last 90 days)," the statement reads. "Recent drug use (illegal drugs or drugs that were not prescribed to you) will result in a disqualification for employment."

"We warn people that they're going to have to pass a drug test as part of the employment procedure, so a lot of people find that out and won't come back for the interview when they realize they won't pass the test," Seiling said. "The downside is that makes it even more difficult to find more good workers, to be honest."

"It's kind of ironic," said Steve Dillon, Veka's corporate marketing director. "We don't see drug problems that much here as a workplace."

A few hours' drive west, the Montgomery County/Dayton region in Ohio is grappling with an even bigger opioid problem.

"Dayton, unfortunately is at the crossroads of the drug trade at the intersection of interstates 70 and 75," says Filip Geeraert, president of Deceuninck North America, another major extruder and designer of vinyl window and door profiles. It's headquartered in the Dayton area.

According to an August 2017 report from CNN, Mexican drug cartels ship illegal opioids, including a highly potent derivative called fentanyl that has caused thousands of overdose deaths across the country, directly to Dayton because of those freeway con-

nections. From there, dealers move the drugs across the country.

They also leave a lot of opioids behind in Ohio—and devastating social problems follow in their wake.

"We're on a pace to have 800 people die this year due to overdose in our county," Montgomery County (Ohio) Sheriff Phil Plummer told NBC News in June 2017. "Per capita, we're number 1 in the nation in overdose deaths."

Beyond the tragic loss of life, the opioid crisis also has created negative ripple effects across the local Dayton economy. One of the biggest is attracting and keeping employees who can pass a drug test.

Like Veka, Deceuninck also has a strict drug-testing policy. The company's job-application form includes this statement that potential employees must sign: "I understand that I may be required to submit a pre-employment and post-employment test for medical exams and/or substance abuse, if not prohibited by law."

"We have had some issues," Geeraert says. "It definitely in the past affected our ability to find workers."

However, Geeraert says things have recently improved on the labor front, though he's not sure why.

"We just hired more than 100 people, and for the first time, they're staying," he told DWM during the GlassBuild America show in Atlanta in September 2017. "Last year, we hired 100 people and we lost 100 people. People would not stay, but now for the first time they're sticking."

Geeraert says Deceuninck seems to be getting a more serious group of workers.

"In the past, our pool was people who didn't have a job," he says. "Now, more than 60 percent of our hires had a job. We did a job fair in July. We had 187 people show up, plus another 100 who applied online. We had close to 300 people, and we hired more than 100. We have people who have degrees, two-year and four-year degrees. We had a completely

# TYPES OF DRUG TESTS

When it comes to the drug tests themselves, fingernails, hair, urine, blood and oral fluids all have different windows of detection. Some have a higher adulteration potential, or potential for someone to cheat the test.

## Fingernail

**Detection Period:**

Up to 6 months

**Cheating potential:**

Difficult



## Hair

**Detection Period:**

Up to 3 months

**Cheating potential:**

Moderate



## Urine

**Detection Period:**

2-3 days

**Cheating potential:**

Easy



## Blood

**Detection Period:**

1-3 days

**Cheating potential:**

Difficult



## Oral Fluid

**Detection Period:**

1-3 days

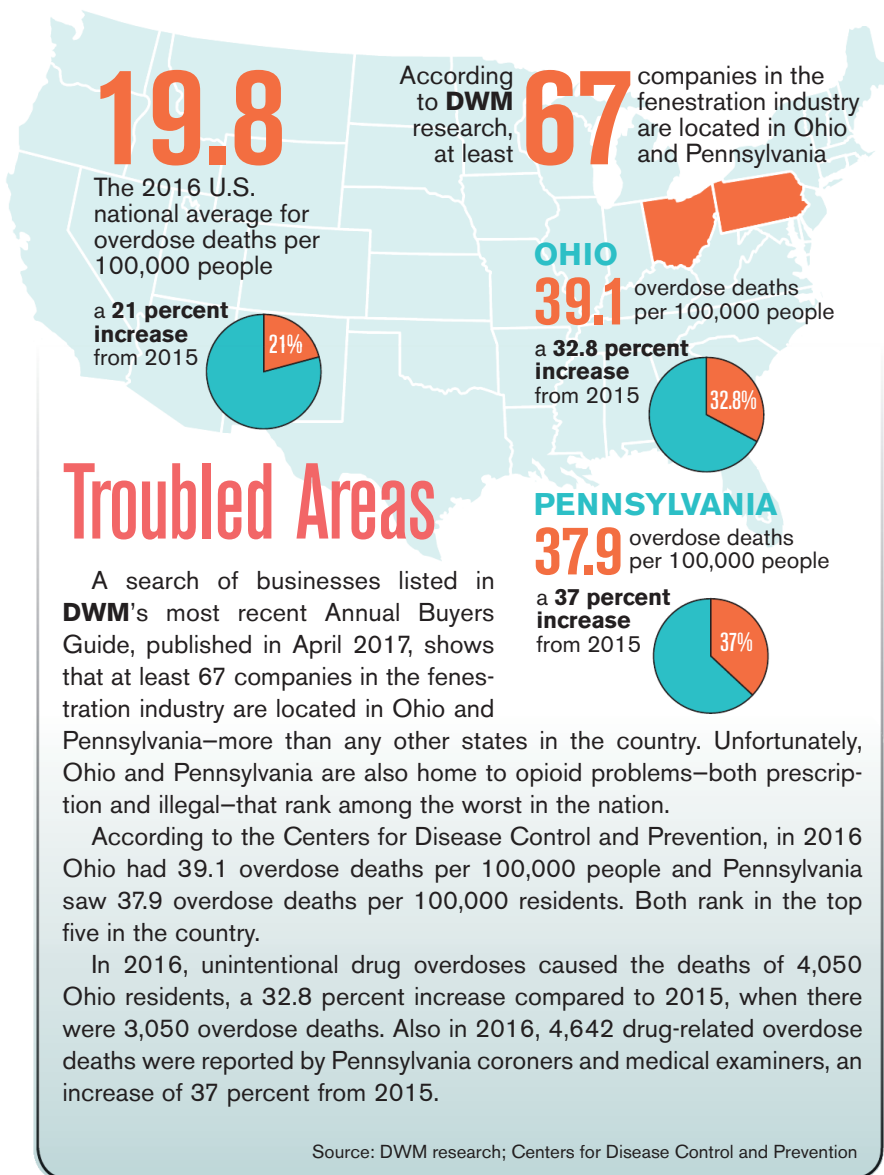
**Cheating potential:**

Difficult



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Source: United States Drug Testing Laboratories Inc.



policies, Mike Burk of GED Integrated Solutions, an expert on glass safety in the workplace, says it's important to look at testing policies and define "under the influence."

"You need to have some rules," Burk said, adding that many states with workers-compensation programs won't pay if drugs or alcohol are involved in an accident.

Without testing available to measure the impairment caused by drugs, employers are unable to identify with accuracy how an employee's drug use might affect the safety of a jobsite.

"Companies need to bring their drug testing policies up to date by looking at current local, state and federal law," said Daquelente, adding that that employers should be aware that people from all age groups use drugs.

"Heroin and fentanyl are not just being used by young people in their 20s," he said. "In Cleveland and Cuyahoga County in Ohio, 125 people between the ages of 30 and 44 overdosed during the first nine months of 2016. In the 45 to 60 age group, 103 people overdosed."

### Marijuana on the March

While the shocking rise in overdose deaths from opioids is grabbing national attention, a less deadly drug is also causing problems in the workplace in very different ways.

Marijuana is currently legal in eight states and the District of Columbia, and more than two dozen states have laws that allow medical use of the drug. While those changes mean fewer potential employees are being saddled with criminal records because they were once caught smoking or selling pot, they're also creating confusion for human-resource departments across many industries.

"You look at different parts of the country like Colorado or Washington State, where marijuana's legal," said Nick Carter of WoodWare, a software company that works with many dealers in the LBM industry. "Some of

different level of people applying, and apparently now they're sticking."

### Drug Testing: Pros and Cons

While better screening for all types of drugs could be helping Deceuninck and other companies in construction and manufacturing keep and retain workers, there's also evidence that it can hurt retention efforts.

Jim Plavecky is a blogger for *dwm-mag.com* and a veteran of the door and window industry. He recently wrote about a window company that released a third of its workforce in 2016 on a single day during a plant-wide random drug test. During the next 12 months, the same company

hired 250 new workers, but only kept 50 of them longer than a year.

Dave Daquelente, executive director of the Ironworker Employers Association of Western Pennsylvania, says it's important to implement appropriate drug-testing policies to promote employee safety and health.

"The current industry challenge is that testing is only available for the presence of drugs, not impairment caused by them," he says. "There hasn't been any approved way to test impairment due to drug use because the way drugs metabolize in the body varies so much. In the future, there will likely be a breath device to test."

When it comes to drug and alcohol



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