

Construction Industry Trends: October 2019 Roundup

As the leaves begin to turn, many contractors are busy trying to close out projects or finish critical phases before colder temperatures and inclement weather arrives. But there was also a lot of news away from the jobsite in October, as the industry pushes for more infrastructure spending, celebrates diversity and new technologies and, unfortunately, deals with more tragic safety incidents. Here's a look at some of the top stories we're following.

More than 150 Organizations Press Congress for Action on Infrastructure



There is a significant need for infrastructure improvements across the United States. Contractors are pressing Congress to deliver a comprehensive funding package.

A group of more than 150 construction firms, manufacturers and organizations have banded together to form the Infrastructure Working Group (IWG). The group, [notes](#)

[ForConstructionPros.com](#), is comprised of members of both the Associated General Contractors and the National Association of Manufacturers and is pressing Congress for bipartisan funding for infrastructure projects. In a letter to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-NY), the IWG called for a funding package built around six key principles. Among them: increasing direct federal investments; opening up opportunities for private investment into U.S. infrastructure projects; and creating efficiencies with procedural processes like permitting, environmental controls and more. Read the more [here](#).

The Takeaway: There has yet to be a significant federal infrastructure spending bill that will effectively address the United States' most pressing infrastructure concerns. The basic idea of fixing crumbling roads, unstable bridges, modernizing civil utilities and much more is one that is touted on both sides of the political aisle — especially during election season. Yet, when it comes time to enact legislation, infrastructure spending becomes a bit of a hot potato, and becomes mired down in details and dollars. Thankfully, there have been [a few smaller spending allocations](#) approved that will begin to address infrastructure issues, but efforts like the IWG's to bring more awareness to the need for a comprehensive infrastructure plan can hopefully move the needle a bit faster.

Hard Rock Hotel Collapse, Rulings on Other Construction Accidents, Highlight Continued Safety Challenges



The need for improved safety practices, including more rigid inspections and leveraging emerging technologies, has been a key issue for construction leaders.

Three construction workers were killed and at least 18 people injured when the upper floors of the under-construction Hard Rock Hotel being built in downtown New Orleans collapsed Oct. 12. The tragedy occurred in the morning hours and rescue crews navigated a dangerous jobsite under the threat of continued collapse for the remainder of the day. By month's end, more than a dozen legal actions for damages had been filed against the lead developer, Citadel Builders and other parties involved in the project. Some of those suits are allege poor design, wrongly submitted test results, rushed work and unskilled workers used on the project. The immediate aftermath is similar to that of the 2018 Florida International University bridge collapse, which killed six people. The National Transportation Safety Board announced their findings on that incident this month, noting that load capacity and calculation errors made by FIGG Bridge Engineers, Inc. were to blame and that consulting engineer, Louis Berger Group, failed to catch the errors. Meanwhile, the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries announced it cited and fined three contractors a total of \$107,200 for their role in a deadly crane accident in downtown Seattle in April that killed two workers and two people in their cars on the street below.

The Takeaway: We're starting to sound like a broken record, but these tragedies really do shine negative light on the industry at a time when it is otherwise doing some pretty amazing and innovative things. Safety continues to be one of the industry's biggest issues, with industry associations and groups putting multiple efforts in place to improve safety practices across the board. And many contractors are paying heed and improving their own processes and technologies. Take Encore Electric, for example, which was named the safest contractor of the year by the Association of General Contractors and Willis Towers Watson. If they're not already, all contractors should be reviewing their own safety procedures. And, if they're having to cut corners or rush jobs to meet demand, perhaps it's time to invest in modern technologies that find efficiencies and boost profitability without sacrificing quality and control.

Celebrating Outstanding Women in Construction



Construction Business Owner's November issue profiles 20 female construction leaders, and is one of many key efforts to improve diversity throughout the construction industry.

In July, *Construction Business Owner* magazine opened up nominations for its inaugural Outstanding Women in Construction (OWIC) contest and received almost 200 nominations. The nominees included roles ranging from CEOs, controllers and technology strategists to PMs and ironworkers all across the United States. Of the submissions, the publication chose 20 to highlight for their extensive contributions to the construction field, their company and community. These 20 amazing women will be featured in the publication's November issue. [Click here for a preview](#) of the 2019 finalists.

The Takeaway: We applaud efforts like this. The industry publication, as well as ENR's [Groundbreaking Women in Construction](#), are just two examples of several industry publications that have put the issue of diversity in the construction workforce in the spotlight. Along with events like the [Women in Construction Leadership and Networking Conference](#), groups and associations like the CFMA and its efforts with the [National Association of Women in Construction](#), the Associated Builders and Contractors Association's [Women in Construction Week](#), and more, there is real momentum toward leveling the playing field for female construction professionals. Viewpoint had a panel dedicated to empowering female construction leaders at our recent Collaborate User Conference and authored [recent blog post on the subject](#) as well. There's still a lot of work to do, however. As one of our own panelists and CFMA member Patsy Dunn noted: "For every hater, there's a supporter, you just have to find them."

Robotic Rebar Technology Attracts Investors



New technology aims to streamline fabrication and assembly of rebar used in construction projects.

Mark Cuban, owner of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks and television personality known for his role on "Shark Tank," is backing new robotic technology to fabricate and assemble steel rebar for the construction industry. The company behind the technology is Toggle, a New York City-based construction startup. Toggle's technology, which has already raised more than \$3 million in funding, aims to help construction teams work more efficiently and remove manual, often dangerous processes. Cuban told Construction Dive the technology "a game changer for the construction industry."

The Takeaway: I immediately think of Bender, the surly, steel girder-bending robot from Futurama. The future, though, is already here and technologies that were only imagined just a few short years ago — even in cartoon form — are quickly becoming reality. The very way contractors operate is rapidly transforming and those that have yet to begin modernizing their own operations could find it harder to compete for work in the near future.

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