



Safety News

Dedicated to ensuring the safest and healthiest working environment for our members

Summer 2026 | Issue 37

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Our Vision

The United Association and its local unions will apply its best practices and resources to build the most educated and safest workforce in all sectors of the piping industry.

Message from Jennifer Massey

Health, Safety, and Environmental Administrator



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In this edition of our newsletter, we take a project-focused look at the wide range of conditions our members face across the industries and facilities where they work. From data centers, healthcare

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facilities, and off-site manufacturing, each environment is characterized by its own hazards, health demands, and operational pressures. In light of that reality, we examine how strong planning, hazard recognition, communication, quality, and worker engagement remain the foundation for safe performance, regardless of project complexity or setting.

A Message from General President Mark McManus

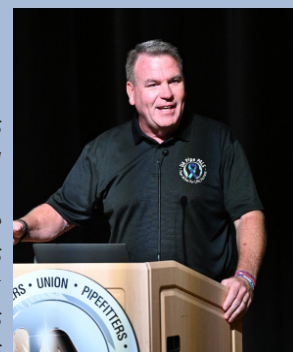
Brothers and Sisters,

The work highlighted in this edition reflects the many environments our members work in across the United Association. From data centers and health care facilities to semiconductor cleanrooms, refineries, occupied buildings, fabrication shops, and off-site manufacturing, the settings may change, but our expectation does not. We plan the work, recognize the hazards, communicate clearly, and execute with discipline. Across every sector, the fundamentals stay the same, and strong outcomes come from doing the basics right every time.

Safety, health, and environmental responsibility are not separate from the work—they are part of it. That includes protecting quality, managing logistics, and maintaining control as conditions change on complex projects.

We also know that taking care of our members means taking care of the whole person. Industrial athletes need hydration, recovery, and fatigue management to perform safely. Mental health support, peer connection, access to care, and clear crisis response pathways all matter. When we support one another early and without stigma, we strengthen every jobsite.

Our responsibility is simple: make sure every member has the tools, training, and support to recognize hazards, speak up early, and work safely. That means reinforcing energy-based thinking, encouraging reporting of near misses, and ensuring concerns are addressed without hesitation at every level of leadership. When we do that, we protect one another, strengthen our work, and carry this organization forward together.



This newsletter also explores a broader understanding of what it means to protect our members. In addition to project-specific safety topics, it addresses whole-worker health with articles on industrial athletes, recovery, mental health support, peer ally programs, crisis response, access to care, and the importance of Stop Work Authority (SWA) and reporting. Taken together, these topics reinforce one message: Safety, health, and environmental responsibility are not separate from the work; they are part of how we do the work the right way. Our goal is to provide information that is practical, relevant, and grounded in the real conditions our members face every day, while continuing to strengthen a culture where every member feels informed, supported, and empowered to speak up.

TRAINING



2148 OSHA 511: Occupational Safety and Health Standards for General Industry

September 14-18 _____ 10:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. _____ Online (Zoom)

2149 OSHA 501:Trainer Course in Occupational Safety and Health
Standards for General Industry

October 19-23 _____ 10:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. _____ Ann Arbor, MI

2150 OSHA 510: Occupational Safety and Health Standards for the Construction Industry

September 28-October 2 _____ 10:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. _____ Online (Zoom)

November 16-2010:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Online (Zoom)

2151 OSHA 500: Trainer Course in Occupational Safety and Health Standards for Construction

October 12-16 _____ 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. _____ Ann Arbor, MI

December 7-11 _____ 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. _____ Ann Arbor, MI

2152 OSHA 502: Update for Construction Industry Outreach Trainers

September 21-24 10:00 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. Online (Zoom)

December 14-17 _____ 10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. _____ Online (Zoom)

2171 Introduction to Peer Support Skills and Mental Health Literacy

September 15-17 _____ 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. _____ Dorchester, MA

October 13-15 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Jacksonville, FL

2172 Advanced Skills in Suicide Prevention Training, Peer Support Skills, and Mental Health Literacy

July 21-23.....8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.....Anchorage, AK

November 10-12 _____ 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. _____ Dorchester, MA

December 8-10 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Jacksonville, FL

2173 Substance Abuse and Addiction in the Workplace

September 14-17 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Online (Zoom)

November 9-12 _____ 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. _____ Online (Zoom)

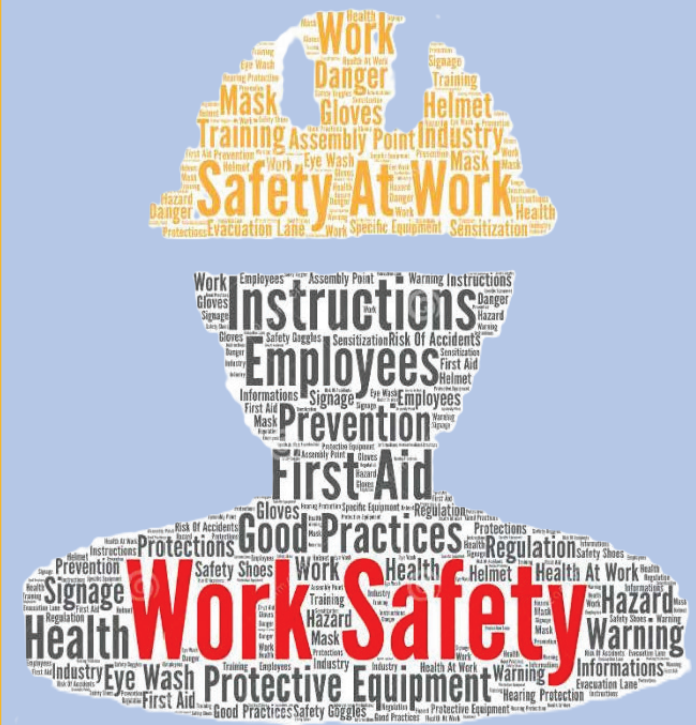
SAFETY AT WORK



APPLYING CORE DISCIPLINES FOR OPTIMAL SAFETY IN ANY SECTOR

This newsletter was built around one idea: While project type matters, fundamentals travel. Whether the work is taking place in a data center, a hospital, a cleanroom, a refinery, a fab shop, a public building, or during a crew meeting about mental health, the same core disciplines still matter. Plan the work. Respect the worker. Recognize the hazard. Speak up early. Support recovery.

Each project type has unique exposures and different opportunities to learn. Data centers teach discipline, hospitals teach human awareness, industrial energy work teaches respect for stored hazards, occupied facilities teach communication, and mental health work teaches us that people need trustworthy systems before a crisis arrives. The best safety cultures connect all these lessons instead of treating them as separate conversations.



PROGRAMMING SAFETY INTO DATA CENTER WORK

Data centers may look clean and orderly, but they are among the most demanding mechanical construction environments. Featuring large-scale systems, piping, and equipment, data center project construction is complex. It involves major crane activity, just-in-time material flow, and restricted access, compounded by fast-moving delivery schedules that rely on precise coordination. These conditions can tempt crews to move faster than is optimal for safety. But in data center work, pace does not replace planning.

Many of the significant risks on data center jobs involve movement, so a strong safety program starts with logistics. Trucks arrive in waves. Modules or owner-furnished equipment may arrive at night for installation the next day. Laydown space is limited. Forklifts, telehandlers, cranes, delivery drivers, and multiple trades may all be working in the same travel path. The project can become a moving hazard before a single pipe is hung unless traffic flow, staging, spotter responsibilities, and exclusion zones are clearly defined in advance. Daily coordination of deliveries, lift plans, and access routes is just as important as the craft work itself.

The mechanical scope includes its own technical hazards. Crews may be tying together large-bore piping, refrigerant systems, generator fuel lines, water treatment equipment, rooftop ductwork, and highly coordinated support steel. Some work occurs in wide-open spaces, but much of it eventually becomes confined to congested corridors, equipment yards, and service aisles. These conditions require dropped-object prevention, overhead-work controls, and verified anchorage. Accommodating temporary power, energized testing, commissioning activities, and overlapping owner operations means the line blurs between construction and live systems. Projects can move from installation to startup conditions without a noticeable pause.

Data center schedules often include long shifts, weekend work, and rapid manpower ramps, all of which take a toll on worker well-being as well as injury prevention. Around-the-clock deliveries lead to fatigue. Crews may shift from daytime heat on rooftops to poor airflow in enclosed spaces at night. Noise from generators, temporary equipment, and lift operations adds another layer of strain. Over time, workers can become mentally overloaded by repetition, access restrictions, and schedule changes. In addition to identifying technical mistakes, supervisors need to watch workers for signs of fatigue, frustration, and shortened attention spans.

High-functioning data center teams protect quality and safety together. Tight tolerances, clean installations, accurate layout, and careful support placement reduce rework. As a result, workers have to make fewer extra lifts, unexpected cuts, and rushed corrections above finished spaces or around sensitive equipment. When the crew takes time to verify dimensions, protect openings, secure tools, and respect the sequence, safety improves because the work is more predictable.

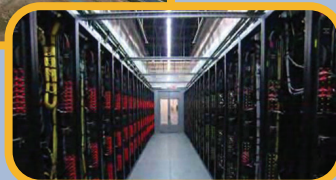
With data center projects, high performance is a product of stabilizing the work, not pushing harder. Precise logistics, controlled deliveries, disciplined lift planning, energy awareness during startup, and close attention to worker fatigue produce conditions for efficiency without creating new risk. In work environments defined by speed and complexity, the safest teams are protected by work routines that are routine in the best possible way. ■



Nicholas Lazo - LU 421



Apple's iData Center,
Maiden, NC



Gerald Alman - LU 421



Richard Cain, Aaron Crouch
LU - 421

SEMICONDUCTOR AND CLEANROOM WORK DEMANDS DISCIPLINE AT THE SMALLEST SCALE

Semiconductor and advanced technology projects can look less hazardous than heavy industrial work because they are cleaner, brighter, and more organized. In reality, the hazard profile is just different. Instead of obvious rough construction exposures, semiconductor facilities and their associated cleanrooms often concentrate risk in contamination control, chemical compatibility, precision work, repetitive motion, complex testing requirements, and the stress that comes from working under exacting standards.

Cleanroom work is mentally challenging. It requires workers to care about microscopic details that play out in extreme cleanliness standards, material handling requirements, gowning, tool wipe-down procedures, packaging integrity, and documentation discipline, all of which shape whether the final system is acceptable. These standards create cognitive load, especially when crews are learning a customer-specific process or working across multiple systems with different purity expectations. A rushed worker is more likely to contaminate a component, miss a tubing prep step, or forget a tool-control requirement. Clear procedures, repetition, and coaching matter in semiconductor work as much as physical barriers do on other jobs.

Another challenge is ergonomics. Precision work often requires smaller movements repeated thousands of times. Orbital weld setup, tubing alignment, valve installation, leak testing, labeling, and tight-access work can strain hands, wrists, shoulders, backs, and necks over time. A job that does not look physically punishing can wear down the body through repetition and static posture. Supervisors need to plan for lighting, bench height, work platform access, rotation where possible, and recovery time, not just production output. This is especially important when crews are working long shifts inside suits, gloves, or other cleanroom garments that add heat and fatigue.

The semiconductor industry uses specialty gases, corrosives, solvents, and pressurized systems that demand precise isolation, testing, purge procedures, and line identification. The work may appear controlled in the cleanroom setting, but there are significant energy and chemical exposures. Workers need to understand what line they are touching and what could be present if the system is not fully isolated. Confusion between similar-looking tubing or unfinished labeling can have serious consequences. In this environment, "pause and verify" is a critical control, not just a catchy slogan.

In semiconductor work, poor quality is rarely just cosmetic. A contaminated fitting, poor weld prep, missed flush step, or unprotected opening leads to costly rework that sends crews back into finished areas, delays startup, and increases exposure. Adhering to high-quality habits removes risk by preventing repeated handling, reopening, and corrective work that precedes injury or contamination.

A healthy semiconductor project culture balances technical rigor with human support. Workers need to be proficient in the standards and comfortable asking questions. In these environments, shame is dangerous. People who are new to a customer, a procedure, or a fabrication method must feel confident enough to say they need more information or another look. Precision work improves when teams are highly trained, methodical, and unafraid to slow down before a mistake turns microscopic risk into major loss. ■



Don Craft - LU 286



Ryan Doolan - LU 286



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Angel Castro - LU 286



Daniel Franco, Isabelle King
LU 286

IMPROVES SAFETY IN RENEWABLE FUEL, REFINERY, AND GAS UTILITY PROJECTS

For the clearest examples of how to employ energy-based hazard recognition, look no further than refinery conversions, renewable fuel projects, and gas utility work. These jobs involve live systems, stored pressure, flammable materials, hot work, demolition around existing infrastructure, line opening, purging, hydrotesting, heavy rigging, and simultaneous operations spread across large footprints. From a safety perspective, control is everything at these sites, where the work is technically impressive and surrounded by high-energy systems.

Uncertainty is a given in most refinery conversions or renewable fuel retrofits, which typically occur in older facilities that may have been modified many times. Documentation and drawings likely do not fully match existing conditions or buried or overhead systems. With discovery as part of the job, the safe response is reevaluation, not improvisation. Unknown piping, missing blinds, unexpected residues, or structural deterioration should trigger a pause, not a workaround. This is where strong permit systems, line verification, gas testing, isolation procedures, and craft-level SWA make the difference between a manageable project and a serious event.

Demolition and rerouting are especially sensitive because crews may be removing one system while protecting another that must stay active. The work can involve temporary utility reroutes, scaffold and support changes, new tie-in points, and multiple subcontractors performing connected tasks. A pressure hazard on one side of the unit, a dropped object from a higher elevation, or a change in crane path can affect everyone. Daily coordination meetings are the control room for safe execution.

Worker health on industrial energy projects deserves attention. Crews may be exposed to heat, process residues, noise, welding fumes, diesel exhaust, long walking distances, and extended shifts during turnarounds or outage windows. Sleep disruption is common, along with insufficient hydration, poor eating patterns, and caffeine dependence. High-energy work is dangerous for fatigued workers because their hazard recognition suffers. When people stop seeing the whole system and focus only on the task in front of them, they are more likely to overlook steps, make informal assumptions, and miss key communication.

With gas utility and LNG work, community safety is at stake. Tie-ins, compressor upgrades, storage work, and utility improvements must be performed with exceptional care. Typical quality requirements, such as testing, purging, X-ray examination, hydrostatic testing, and documented quality checks, have a heightened public safety aspect. Any worker who touches the system needs to understand both the immediate task and the larger consequences of getting it wrong.

These projects teach a broader safety lesson: Complacency is as much a risk as obvious danger. Over time, industrial workers can become comfortable around pressure, heat, and gas systems because they see them often. But experience should sharpen respect, not dull it. The strongest teams keep asking key safety questions: Where is the energy? How is it isolated? What is the release path if control fails? What would be harmed first? That discipline is what turns dangerous work into managed work. ■



Reese Hartman, Kelly Hodge
LU 25



Kurt Reeves - LU 25



Carson Cain - LU 22



Josh O'Dell - LU 25



Mathew Pawelski - LU 22

PAPER MILLS, BOILER SYSTEMS, AND WATER TREATMENT WORK TEST EVERYDAY DISCIPLINE

Paper mills, boiler feedwater projects, and process-water system upgrades offer the one-two hazard punch of industrial construction in an active manufacturing environment. Crews face a range of challenging conditions, from steam, condensate, and chemical treatment systems to rotating equipment, elevated platforms, wet walking surfaces, old structures, and tight shutdown windows. Because many hazards are present in the background every day, they are familiar, which can create a false sense of comfort. Discipline is critical in these environments.

One of the most serious risks in this work is stored thermal and pressure energy. Steam, hot water, and chemical feed systems can remain dangerous long after equipment appears quiet. A closed valve is not proof of zero energy, nor does a cool surface mean relieved pressure. Workers need to verify isolation, open the system intentionally, and respect line-of-fire principles whenever breaking containment. Burns, pressure releases, and unexpected movement are some of the most life-changing events in industrial construction work, and they usually begin with a step that felt routine.

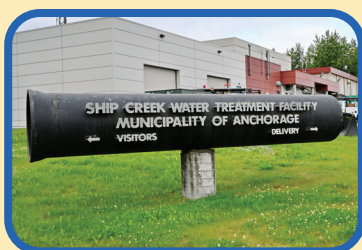
The list of real health hazards is serious. Chemical handling around demineralizers, regeneration skids, water treatment systems, or process utilities can expose crews to caustics, acids, vapors, and splash risks. Proper storage, labeling, eyewash access, chemical-resistant personal protective equipment, and a clear understanding of incompatible materials are essential. If the crew knows the work but does not know the chemistry, the planning is incomplete. Industrial hygiene belongs in the conversation from the start.

Mill and utility work often occurs around grating, elevated pipe racks, damp concrete, trenches, and temporary routes that were never designed for comfortable movement, making housekeeping and access equally important. A minor slip in a process area can quickly become a serious fall or contact event if the worker is near steam lines, rotating equipment, or open edges. Clean travel paths, stable work platforms, protected floor openings, and realistic staging plans are notably effective at reducing risk. The safest crews control the full route to and from the work area, not just the installation point.

The shutdown window on these projects can create intense pressure. Owners want systems back online, and the process team may be waiting. Other contractors may be sequenced behind one another. This is when leaders have to protect the basics, knowing that a tired worker rushing through a tie-in or overlooking a missing blind does not help the schedule. It threatens it. Fit-for-duty matters, and good leadership means protecting the tempo of the work, not just the calendar.

These types of industrial projects demonstrate how quality and safety depend on each other. Correct valve installation, accurate spool fit, good weld preparation, proper flushing, and complete testing prevent rework in spaces that are difficult to access and are full of energy sources. When the crew completes a correct installation the first time, they avoid repeated exposure to hazardous conditions such as heat, wet surfaces, chemicals, and elevated structures.

Paper mills and water system projects may not receive much public attention, but they remind us that everyday systems still deserve exceptional care. Boilers, feedwater skids, demineralizers, pumps, and utility piping support the operations people depend on. The safest crews honor that by treating routine work with expert-level attention. ■



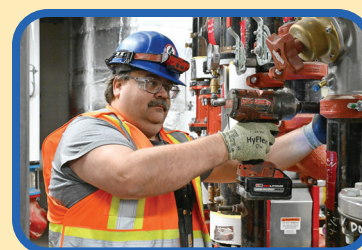
Water Treatment Facility Anchorage, AK



Justine Brown - LU 367



Michael McPhee, Thomas Baldwin
LU - 682



Cory Penny LU - 682

OCCUPIED FACILITIES EXPAND JOBSITE PLANNING TO INCLUDE PUBLIC SAFETY

Construction work inside airports, offices, hotels, casinos, schools, and other occupied facilities increases exposure in many ways. In these environments, crews are working around much more than their own team and other trades. They are in proximity to the public, building staff, security teams, customers, patients, or travelers who are likely not aware of construction hazards. Safety planning has to account for both the workers and the occupants, often at the same time.

Separation comes first. Public-facing work needs well-designed barriers, protected walk paths, clear signage, controlled access, and excellent housekeeping. A worker may know that a lift is swinging overhead or that a ceiling opening is protected by procedure, but a member of the public does not. The control has to be visible, stable, and understandable. This is especially important in transportation hubs and hospitality spaces where people are distracted, carrying bags, following crowds, or moving through unfamiliar routes.

Next is timing. Many occupied facility projects shift mechanical work to nights, weekends, or narrow shutdown windows to reduce impact on operations. That is logical for the customer, but it can shift risk onto the workforce as a result of irregular sleep, fatigue, poor eating patterns, and reduced supervision during odd hours. A crew working overnight in an active airport or hotel is managing the mechanical task and the biological strain of working when the body expects rest. Leaders need to plan for this reality through lighting, break schedules, realistic work packages, and direct conversations about fatigue.

Occupied spaces also demand a different level of communication. Noise, odors, dust, and changes to access affect people quickly. A perfectly safe construction activity would create a problem if the facility team was not informed, if emergency egress was narrowed, or if a sensitive adjacent space was overlooked. Mechanical contractors should think of themselves as part of the building communication system on these projects. When owners, operators, and nearby occupants understand what is happening and when, the environment becomes calmer and easier to control.

Shutdown work can be very sensitive in occupied facilities. Airports, hotels, and commercial buildings rely on HVAC, plumbing, exhaust, controls, and fire-life safety systems that cannot be interrupted casually. The outage itself may be short, but the preparation behind it should be detailed. Who is affected? What backup exists? What is the go-or-no-go point? What is the restart plan? Who verifies that the system is ready to return to service? These questions matter because a poorly planned shutdown in an occupied building has consequences well beyond the work area.

Contractors should also consider the human factor in their professional interactions. Crews working in public settings are constantly observed, and the team's actions become part of the safety climate. Calm, respectful communication, controlled material movement, tool security, and consistent housekeeping build trust with the facility and reduce friction. That trust matters when conditions change, and the crew needs support or flexibility from the owner.

Occupied facility work highlights how safety is partly technical and partly relational. The barriers, plans, permits, and shutdown procedures matter. So do courtesy, timing, and communication. The safest teams are the ones that understand both. ■



Oklahoma City, OK - LU344



Dakota D. Simpson - LU 344



Bethany Children's Health Center Expansion,
Oklahoma City, OK

RISKS ARE THERE, JUST DIFFERENT, IN PREFAB, OFF-SITE MANUFACTURING, AND FAB SHOP WORK

Prefabrication and off-site manufacturing continue to reshape mechanical construction because they shift work from the field into controlled environments. While that shift improves quality, reduces congestion onsite, and lowers exposure to some of the most difficult field conditions, it doesn't eliminate risk altogether. It changes where the risk lives. A mature safety program has to recognize that shop work, module assembly, kitting, and transport each introduce their own hazards that deserve planning as much as field installation does.

In the shop, hazard exposures usually come from material movement, welding and cutting, repetitive tasks, and workstation design. Pipe, duct, tubing, structural members, and assembled skids do not move themselves. Cranes, forklifts, carts, dollies, rollers, and overhead lifting devices are central to shop work. When routes are poorly defined or storage grows cluttered, the shop can shift from efficient to hazardous quickly. Strong 5S lean practices, designated laydown, clear travel lanes, and disciplined housekeeping do more than keep the space tidy. They prevent struck-by events, reduce awkward handling, and help workers locate what they need without unnecessary motion.

Ergonomics impacts shop safety too. Repetitive movement such as cutting, grinding, welding, fitting, labeling, assembly, and inspection uses the same body mechanics, all shift long. Even highly skilled workers can accumulate strain with the wrong bench height, limited rotation, or overexertion using tools. Adjustable workstations, lifting aids, proper fixturing, and job rotation, where feasible, improve comfort, and they are investments in keeping skilled workers healthy enough to stay in the trade.

Welding fumes, noise, lighting, and ventilation impact worker health. A clean fabrication building can still expose workers to airborne contaminants, heat, or eye strain if the environment is not designed around the actual work being performed. Ventilation needs to match the process. Hearing protection needs to fit the exposure. Inspection stations need enough light for quality and for the workers' vision. The best fabrication environments treat health protection as a production asset.

Modules add additional safety layers to consider. A module that is easier and safer to assemble in the shop still needs to be transported, lifted, and installed safely in the field. That means comprehensive rigging plans, center-of-gravity calculations, secure packaging, finished surface protection, and handoff communication between shop and field. A successful module arrives intact, is placed without improvisation, and reduces field exposure.

Off-site manufacturing demonstrates how quality and safety reinforce each other. A well-organized kit, complete work package, clear labeling, and stable workflow reduce confusion. Clarity reduces workarounds, missing parts, last-minute cuts, and rushed decisions. Good prefab work makes the field safer because it removes uncertainty before installation ever begins.

Prefabrication is not a shortcut. It is a different work environment with new opportunities and unique responsibilities. By treating shops and off-site facilities as serious safety environments, not just support spaces, contractors unlock the full value of modular work.



Mark Gaines, Cody Heath - LU 22



Alderic Rochell - LU 344



Noah Beckdahl, James Felton - LU 375



Matt Robinson - LU 22

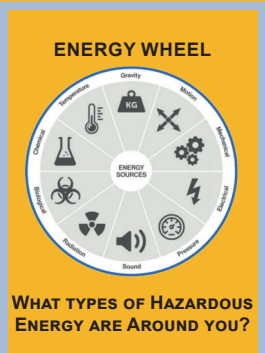


Jeremiah Hardesty, Jake Grover,
Andrew Ferkinhoff - LU 375

SAFETY SUPERPOWERS: HAZARD RECOGNITION, REPORTING, AND STOP WORK AUTHORITY (SWA)

Every project type featured in this newsletter depends on a key safety skill: hazard recognition. Whether in cleanrooms, refineries, or occupied facilities, workers must be able to recognize what can hurt them before it does.

Hazard recognition may sound simple, but under schedule pressure, people tend to notice the obvious and overlook what is subtle. They see the open edge but miss the stored pressure, notice the hot pipe but not the line of fire, and plan the lift but not the travel path. This behavior is human nature. The safety solution is ongoing training and structural adjustments.



One of the most successful ways to improve hazard recognition is to think in terms of energy. Instead of focusing only on the mechanics of the task, crews benefit from looking at what sources of energy are present and how they are controlled. All energy exposures deserve attention: electrical, mechanical, pressure, thermal, chemical, gravity, motion, sound, and biological. Energy scans widen the conversation and help the team see beyond the initial, obvious danger and identify what could happen if control is lost.

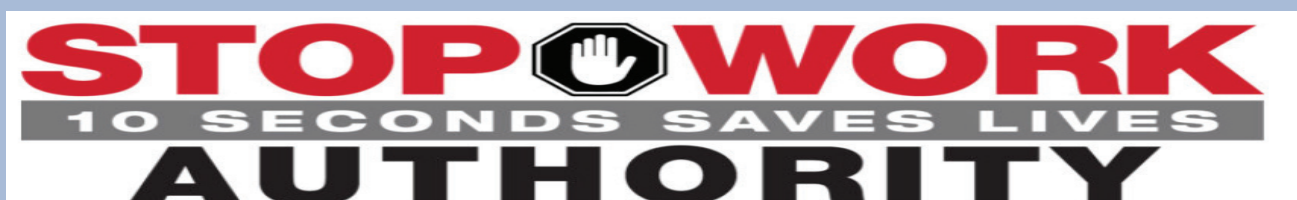
Step up the pre-task planning language to uncover more hazards. Instead of saying, "Everyone be careful," crews need to ask more probing questions: Where is the energy? How is it isolated? What direct controls are in place? What has changed since yesterday? What would cause the crew to stop? These questions lead to a more meaningful brief. Because this type of discussion is based on a shared system for looking at risk rather than instinct or seniority, it's easier for new workers to contribute.

A company's culture around reporting is another part of this conversation. Teams can talk about safety all day, but if workers hide minor injuries, close calls, dropped objects, contamination events, or process mistakes, there's no real information to work with. Near misses matter because they are often the last free lesson before someone gets hurt. Early reporting catches the small things before they turn big: strains that become serious injuries or quality issues that become a major rework if they are ignored. Crews need to hear from leaders that reporting demonstrates professionalism and speaking up protects others.

Another piece of the hazard recognition pie is SWA. Its success depends on full leadership support. Workers will not intervene if they believe they will be mocked, blamed, or punished for delaying the schedule. Supervisors have to prove with their actions that thoughtful stops are respected. When a worker says that something does not feel right, the response should be curiosity and gratitude, not irritation. That single leadership choice shapes whether employees will voice or bury their concerns the next time.

Finally, there is a less tangible human side to hazard recognition that can be powerful. Workers often sense a problem before they can articulate it. Maybe the plan feels off, communication seems incomplete, or the crew appears rushed or distracted. Emotional intelligence helps people trust those signals without overreacting. It allows them to pause, ask better questions, and speak up calmly. In this way, culture and psychology support the technical side of safety.

The strongest jobsites do not rely on luck or heroics. They rely on workers who are trained to see risk, are confident enough to report it, and are supported to stop work when conditions change. Everything else in a safety program gets stronger with those three habits as a basis. ■



THE TECHNICIANS' GUIDE TO HFC PHASEDOWN AND FIRE SUPPRESSION CHANGES

A major regulatory change now affecting the fire suppression industry has direct implications for installers, service technicians, inspectors, and contractors working with halocarbon clean agent systems. Under the American Innovation and Manufacturing Act, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is phasing down hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs, while also increasing release prevention, reclamation, technician training, and recordkeeping. For the fire suppression sector, the message is clear: Environmental compliance, proper handling, and documented safe work practices are now as important as system performance. The rule does not require a blanket replacement of existing HFC systems, but it does change how they are serviced, repaired, installed, and disposed of.

Beginning January 1, 2026, covered entities may not knowingly vent or release HFCs into the environment during the installation, servicing, repair, or disposal of fire suppression equipment. The new release requirements also apply when the specified equipment is used for fire suppression technician training. Owners and operators need to maintain their equipment in order to prevent releases. EPA provides limited exemptions in certain situations, including essential testing, specific design and development activities when a suitable simulant cannot be used, and emergency discharges for legitimate fire suppression purposes. That means technicians must plan work carefully and treat avoidable discharges as both a safety issue and a compliance issue.

The new requirements also change how HFC systems are recharged and installed. As of January 1, 2026, recycled HFCs must be used for servicing and repair where HFCs are used. Beginning January 1, 2030, recycled HFCs must also be used for the initial installation of fire suppression equipment using HFCs. Disposal requirements also effective January 1, 2026, state that either the HFCs need to be recovered before fire suppression equipment is sent for disposal, or equipment still containing the HFCs must be sent to a disposal facility. Recovered HFCs must then be sent to a certified fire suppressant recycler or reclaimer or destroyed through an approved process.

Training is another major part of the rule. Fire suppression technicians must complete a one-time training requirement covering proper practices for installation, servicing, repair, and disposal. For technicians employed before the rule takes effect, that training must be completed by June 1, 2026. For technicians hired after January 1, 2026, training must be completed within 30 days of hire, or by June 1, 2026, whichever is later.

This is more than paperwork. Cylinders are under pressure, and accidental discharge can create serious hazards. Lack of training is one documented cause of non-fire-related system discharges. Technicians need to know the system they are working on, as well as how to disable release circuits before beginning work, how to secure cylinders properly, and how to use manufacturer-approved protective devices during removal and transport.

Reporting and recordkeeping are featured in the rule as well. Beginning in 2027, certain covered entities that perform first fill, service, or recharging of equipment, or recycle HFCs, must submit annual electronic reports by February 14 covering the prior calendar year. Certain entities must also keep records for three years, including copies of annual reports, technician training records, and documentation showing that HFCs were recovered before equipment was sent for disposal. For contractors and technicians, the takeaway is simple: The HFC phasedown is no longer a future environmental issue. It is now a field practice, training, maintenance, and documentation issue that must be built into the way the work is performed. ■



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HEALTH AT WORK



INDUSTRIAL ATHLETES NEED FUEL, RECOVERY, AND RESPECT

Construction asks workers to perform like industrial athletes. The trade demands strength, mobility, endurance, focus, balance, grip, problem-solving, and recovery, often all in the same shift. Yet the industry often sees the worker-athlete's need for hydration, nutrition, sleep, heat management, and recovery as personal issues rather than core safety topics. That needs to change. Workers who are depleted in any or all of these ways are not just uncomfortable; they are more vulnerable to injury, error, conflict, mental health issues, and long-term damage to their health.

Hydration is basic and often overlooked. Workers should not wait until they feel thirsty, dizzy, or cramp up before drinking water. By then, performance is already compromised. Employers need to build hydration into the day, offering accessible water, planned breaks, acclimatization for heat, and a culture that does not treat cooling down as weakness. Supervisors who normalize hydration send a powerful message: We care that you make it healthy through the shift, not just that you keep moving.

Nutrition matters for the same reason. Construction workers often run hard on caffeine and convenience food or skip meals altogether. That pattern produces sharp swings in energy, mood, and attention. More stable fuel means better decisions, more patience, and a lower chance of the late-shift crash that makes people careless. The goal is steadier performance, not perfection. Workplaces need to help employees accept that adequate meals, planned snacks, and sufficient water are keys to achieving this goal.

Sleep and recovery are safety cornerstones, especially on projects with long commutes, night work, turnaround schedules, or repeated overtime. A fatigued worker may appear to be fully functioning, but in truth has slower reactions, reduced memory, and a shorter fuse. Fatigue affects line-of-fire awareness, driving, tool control, and communication. Leaders need to be honest in evaluating when working more hours is increasing employee instability, not helping productivity.

Pain is common in the trades, and the culture often downplays its impact. Musculoskeletal health deserves special attention because workers kneel, lift, climb, reach overhead, pull, push, and crawl in awkward positions day after day. Stretching before work definitely helps, but it is not enough. Employers need to embrace better access planning, material handling, lifting aids, and work height improvements. They also need to actively promote early reporting of discomfort because ignored pain leads to restriction, which then becomes lost time or permanent damage.

Mental health is part of the industrial athlete's fitness, too. Stress, family strain, travel, financial pressure, substance misuse, and isolation all affect safety performance. A strong crew culture recognizes when someone seems withdrawn, angry, distracted, or not like themselves. Checking in is part of being a team and protecting workers.

The industrial athlete image can be useful in helping change attitudes and behavior. Like athletes, construction workers benefit from training, fueling, recovering, and asking for help when something feels wrong. That discipline deserves respect. Whole-worker health is a strong foundation for reliable safety performance. ■



BUILD YOUR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT SYSTEM BEFORE THERE'S A CRISIS



Mental health deserves the same level of planning and visibility as any other serious safety issue. Pressure comes at construction workers from multiple directions: long shifts, shutdown windows, travel, pain, family strain, financial stress, and a persistent expectation to stay tough and productive. Warning signs of an impending crisis show up as irritability, isolation, unusual risk-taking, missed shifts, exhaustion, or a sharp change in attitude. A strong safety culture does not wait until a worker falls apart in public. It builds support early, makes check-ins normal, and treats emotional distress as something that can be addressed, not hidden.

Psychological safety is part of this work. People need to know they can say, “I am not okay,” just as clearly as they can say, “This lift plan is wrong,” or “This space is not ready.” Leadership tone matters: When supervisors listen, keep their word, avoid ridicule, and follow up with respect, crews learn that speaking up is safe. When stress and mental health are treated as private weaknesses, workers go quiet, risks multiply, and the whole job suffers. Open communication, trust, inclusion, constructive feedback, and visible concern for well-being are protective measures, not extras. ■

PEER ALLIES CREATE A BRIDGE BETWEEN CONCERN AND CARE

One of the most practical ways to strengthen mental health support is to build a peer ally network. The concept is simple: Make it clear to the membership that mental health and addiction struggles are real, common, and worth talking about, then recruit trusted volunteers who are willing to be the first point of connection. The best programs start with a direct announcement at a union meeting, safety meeting, or crew gathering. Explain why the program matters, name the stigma that keeps people silent, and make it clear that needing help is not a failure. When leaders speak honestly about struggle, members are far more likely to believe the message.

Peer ally programs work best when the group reflects the makeup of the membership. Different ages, backgrounds, races, genders, and experience levels matter because people are more likely to open up to someone they can relate to. A peer ally is not expected to be a therapist. The role is to notice, listen, ask direct questions when needed, stay calm, and help connect a member to the care they need. That bridge can be lifesaving, especially for workers who would never start talking with a formal counselor or supervisor.

Training and resources matter here, too. A peer ally program should not be built on good intentions alone. Practical training, such as a short intervention-focused course, gives volunteers language for difficult conversations and the confidence to act. Just as important, allies need a current list of resources: the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, any employee assistance program, local crisis teams, treatment facilities, and



mental health or addiction providers who are currently accepting new clients. The most effective programs do not wait for perfect conditions. They start, they learn, and they improve. ■



AN EFFECTIVE MENTAL HEALTH RESPONSE DEPENDS ON LAYERS OF RESOURCES

When a worker or family member is in crisis, a strong response system should offer more than a poster on the wall. A better model includes three layers of help. First, there is someone to talk to: a trained counselor available through 988 or another crisis line who can de-escalate, assess urgency, and help the person stay connected in the moment. Second, there is someone to respond: a mobile crisis team that can meet a person where they are when phone support is not enough. Third, there is a safe place to go: a crisis receiving, stabilization, or respite setting where a person can be observed, supported, and connected to next steps without automatically ending up in jail, undergoing unnecessary law enforcement contact, or enduring a chaotic emergency department experience.

That framework matters in construction because crises do not arrive neatly during business hours. They happen in parking lots, motel rooms, trucks, living rooms, and jobsite trailers. They involve fear, shame, fatigue, and sometimes substance use. A safety-minded organization should plan for that reality. Crews should know when to call 988, when to involve emergency services, how to keep a person from being left alone in acute distress, and how to arrange safe transportation and follow-up care. Lower-acuity support, such as hotlines and peer support options, can help a person reach out before a bad day becomes the worst day of their life.

A healthier crisis response system also reduces the overuse of law enforcement for behavioral health emergencies. On a jobsite, that principle translates into using the right response for the problem. If the issue is an emotional crisis, panic, suicidal thinking, or substance use disorder, the first question should not only be who can control the scene, but also who can help the person recover. Safety and dignity can and should exist together. ■

ADVOCATE FOR ADEQUATE ACCESS TO CARE

A worker can do everything right—ask for help, accept support—and still run into a broken system. Closed provider panels, thin insurance networks, unclear coverage rules, prior authorization delays, and “fail-first” requirements can all block care at the exact moment it is needed. That is why mental health support cannot stop at encouragement alone. A real commitment to health means pushing for plans and systems that cover medically necessary treatment, including crisis services, with clear and fair standards for approval. If a network is inadequate, workers should not be punished with higher costs for seeking care elsewhere.

The strongest support systems make room for more than one doorway to care. Integrated care models, telehealth, mobile response, crisis stabilization, and peer services all have a place because people enter care in different ways. Sustainable funding for 988 and emergency mental health services is essential because crisis care cannot depend on luck. Strong provider networks matter because a referral is useless if no one is available. All of this hinges on workforce development to ensure there are enough counselors, peer specialists, and crisis professionals to meet current and future demand.

On the jobsite, that big system discussion comes down to one simple question: When a member says they need help, can we connect them to help today? If the answer is no, then the system still has work to do. Safety leaders may not control every insurance rule or state policy, but they can still be informed, speak up, and remove barriers wherever possible. ■



IS YOUR JOBSITE MENTAL HEALTH READY

A mental health-ready jobsite is built on routines. Preparation means that crew members know where 988 information is posted, Foremen know the peer allies by name, and resource lists are current. New hires learn right away that mental health and addiction are safety issues, not taboo topics. Supervisors know how to ask direct questions, how to stay with a person in crisis, and how to escalate without panic. In this culture, coworkers understand that checking on someone is part of brotherhood, sisterhood, and professional responsibility.

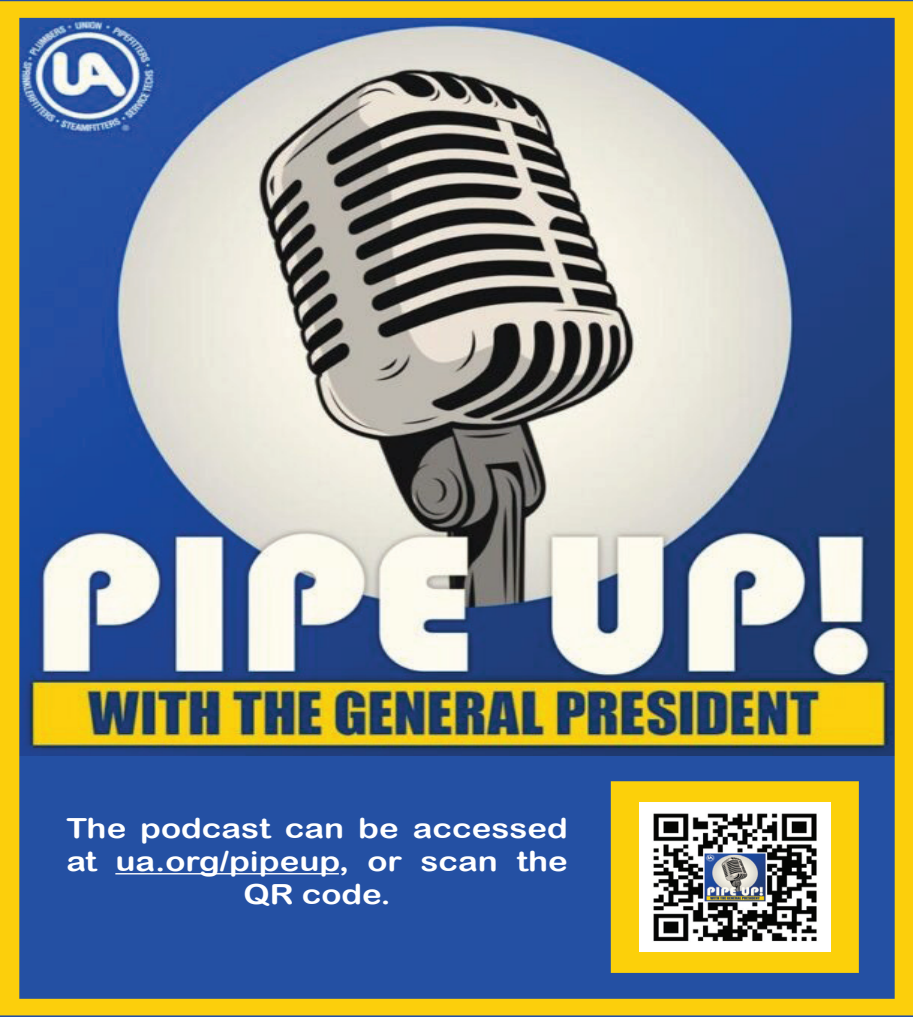


Most of all, on a mental health-ready jobsite, people believe that recovery is possible. No worker should be defined forever by the hardest day they have ever had. If we want safer projects, stronger crews, and healthier families, we must build systems that make it easier to speak, easier to respond, and easier to get real care. That is our safety work. ■

SAFETY AWARENESS DATES AND EVENTS FOR YOUR CALENDAR



- * **August 10-16:** [Safe + Sound Week](#)
- * **September:**
 - * [National Alcohol & Drug Addiction Recovery Month](#)
 - * [Suicide Prevention Awareness Month](#)
- * **September 14-18:** [Construction Suicide Prevention Week](#)



The poster has a blue background with a yellow border. In the top left corner is the IA logo, which is a circular emblem with 'IA' in the center and 'INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIREFIGHTERS' around the perimeter. In the center is a large, stylized microphone. Below the microphone, the words 'PIPE UP!' are written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. Underneath that, a yellow banner contains the text 'WITH THE GENERAL PRESIDENT' in blue, bold, sans-serif capital letters. At the bottom left, white text reads: 'The podcast can be accessed at ua.org/pipeup, or scan the QR code.' To the right of this text is a QR code that, when scanned, likely leads to the podcast.

The podcast can be accessed at ua.org/pipeup, or scan the QR code.

If you or someone you know
needs immediate help



988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - a free and confidential (U.S.) resource that connects individuals with skilled, trained counselors 24/7.
Call 988 or 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

Use the online **Lifeline Crisis Chat**