



# Safety News

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

January 2026 | Issue 35

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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,

As we approach the end of another year, I want to take a moment to reflect on the dedication, resilience, and professionalism that our mem-

bers demonstrate across every local and every jobsite. Each of you contributes to the strength of the United Association in ways that extend far beyond the work you perform. The systems you install, the facilities you maintain, and the critical infrastructure you support directly affect the quality of life for families and communities all across America. This is a responsibility none of us takes lightly, and your commitment to working safely and looking out for one another remains the foundation of our success.

The close of the year provides an opportunity to take stock of the progress we have made together. Throughout this past year, we have strengthened our safety training, expanded our training resources,

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and continued to elevate the importance of physical and mental wellness within our workforce. We have seen crews rise to challenges with professionalism and integrity. We have seen leaders promote safety and mental health with clarity and purpose. We have seen members support one another in ways that reflect the true spirit of union solidarity.

## A Message from General President Mark McManus



I am incredibly proud of what the Pipe PALS committee has achieved over the past year. Pipe PALS has taken the lead, but it has also been the steadfast dedication of every member from each local union across our two great nations that has prioritized

the well-being of our members within the United Association. As we begin a new year, I reaffirm my pledge as your General President to keep the safety and well-being of our members at the forefront of everyone's minds. In 2026, we will double our efforts to work with our contractor and owner partners to ensure every member knows the support available. Safety isn't just about concrete parameters; it also includes the mental well-being of every member. May you all have a peaceful holiday season and a very Happy New Year!

As we look ahead to 2026, we do so with optimism and focus. The coming year will bring new opportunities to advance our safety culture, increase mental health awareness, embrace innovation, and ensure that every member has the knowledge and resources they need to stay healthy and safe on the job. Our goal remains the same. We want every member to go home at the end of each day in the same condition they arrived in, and we want every member to feel supported not only in their work, but in their overall mental and emotional well-being.

This edition of our newsletter includes a comprehensive set of articles that address some of the most significant challenges and emerging trends affecting our workforce. We're exploring the risks created when workers feel pressured to rush, the rising number of incidents involving workers being struck, the unique hazards associated with night work, and the evolving landscape of fall protection. We also discuss key issues related to safety culture, including Stop Work Authority, the connection between injuries and our industry's economic health, and the realities of substance misuse. Finally, we include an expanded feature on mental health and wellness, recognizing that emotional and psychological well-being are just as important as physical safety.

I want to thank every member who continues to raise concerns, offer suggestions, participate in training, and support their fellow workers. Your voice matters, and your engagement is essential to our shared success. Please feel free to reach out at any time with questions, ideas, or requests for support at [jmassey@uanet.org](mailto:jmassey@uanet.org). Your insight and feedback shape the work we do, and they help us continuously improve the resources we provide.

Wishing you and your families a safe, peaceful, and meaningful end to the year. I look forward to the work we will accomplish together in 2026. ■

## TRAINING



### 2026 OSHA Outreach Training

#### 2148 OSHA 511

##### Occupational Safety and Health Standards for General Industry

February 2-6 .....	10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Online
April 20-24 .....	10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Online
June 22-26 .....	10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Online
September 14-18 .....	10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Online

#### 2149 OSHA 501

##### Trainer Course in Occupational Safety and Health Standards for General Industry

April 27 - May 1 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Ann Arbor, MI
October 19-23 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Ann Arbor, MI

#### 2150 OSHA 510

##### OSHA Standards for the Construction Industry

February 9-13 .....	10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Online
May 11-15 .....	10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Online
July 13-17 .....	10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Online
September 28 - October 2 .....	10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Online
November 16-20 .....	10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Online

#### 2151 OSHA 500

##### Trainer Course in Occupational Safety and Health Standards for Construction

March 16-20 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Ann Arbor, MI
June 15-19 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Ann Arbor, MI
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

February 9-12 .....	10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Online
April 6-9 .....	10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Online
July 20-23 .....	10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Online
September 21-24 .....	10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Online
December 14-17 .....	10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Online

#### 2171 Introduction to Peer Support Skills and Mental Health Literacy

January 13-15 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. LU 188, Savannah, GA
March 24-26 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. LU 296, Meridian, ID
June 2-4 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. LU 367, Anchorage, AK
September 15-17 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. LU 537, Dorchester, MA
October 13-15 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. LU 234, Jacksonville, FL

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

February 10-12 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. LU 188, Savannah, GA
April 21-23 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. LU 296, Meridian, ID
July 21-23 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. LU 367, Anchorage, AK
November 10-12 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. LU 537, Dorchester, MA
December 8-10 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. LU 234, Jacksonville, FL

#### 2173 Substance Abuse and Addiction in the Workplace

February 9-12 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Online
May 11-14 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Online
September 14-17 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Online
November 9-12 .....	8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Online

**SAFETY AT WORK**

## Why Hurry Creates Hazards and Raises Costs on the Job

When construction workers feel pressure to meet deadlines, catch up after delays, or accommodate schedule changes, they understandably hurry, which can lead to problems and hidden costs. Rushing affects decision-making in subtle ways that increase the likelihood of incidents, near misses, and costly rework.

Rushing shifts a worker's focus from deliberate action to quick completion, reducing hazard awareness. Whether experienced or new on the job, a worker who usually double-checks a valve or inspects fall protection gear may skip these steps when feeling pressured to hurry.

Fatigue compounds the problem. Construction work often involves long hours, physical strain, and early mornings. When workers feel tired and rushed simultaneously, their reaction time and hazard recognition diminish—a combination that can lead to more errors and incidents.

These examples from the field highlight the value of slowing down: in one case, a worker preparing to open a system noticed something unusual and paused to verify isolation. This decision prevented a dangerous release because the valve had not been fully closed. In another case, a rigger took a moment to recheck a shackle and discovered a loose pin—an action that prevented a potentially serious dropped load.

Beyond safety concerns, rushing affects quality and productivity. Work completed too quickly often requires rework. Misaligned components, incorrect measurements, and overlooked details slow project progress and cost contractors valuable time and resources. These errors can also damage relationships with owners and risk future work opportunities.

### Managing Production Pressure is Key

Supervisors must communicate that safety always takes priority over speed and that no worker will be penalized for taking the time needed to verify conditions. Workers who feel supported are more likely to avoid shortcuts and speak up when something feels wrong.

Workers themselves must trust their instincts and remain aware of their surroundings. A few extra seconds spent checking equipment, evaluating conditions, or clarifying communication can prevent serious incidents. Professionalism in construction is not defined by speed but by consistent attention to safety and quality.

Rushing may seem harmless in the moment, but its consequences can have lasting effects. When crews slow down enough to think, plan, and communicate, they create safer worksites and produce higher-quality work. The decision to pause does not delay the job when it protects the workers needed to complete it. ■

## Awareness Essential in Slowing the Rise of Struck-By Incidents

Statistics show an increase in struck-by incidents and the accompanying serious injuries and fatalities. These events happen fast, often in areas where workers feel most comfortable, and typically result from reduced visibility, rushed decision-making, or a breakdown in communication.

Construction sites are becoming more crowded with multiple trades working side by side, deliveries happening throughout the day, and heavy equipment constantly in motion. Workers sometimes assume operators can see them or believe they have enough time to step through an equipment zone, but when their assumptions are incorrect, struck-by incidents and injuries can occur.

Limited visibility is the number-one factor. Large equipment, such as excavators, forklifts, dump trucks, and telehandlers, has significant blind spots. Even the most skilled operator cannot see a worker standing in a blind spot, so safety resides primarily with the worker. Before entering an equipment zone, workers must make eye contact with the operator or receive a clear signal from the operator.

Rigging operations have their own risk, too. Loads can swing or shift unexpectedly, and lines under tension can snap or recoil. A worker who steps into a load path or moves beneath suspended material is exposed to significant danger. Most struck-by incidents during lifting tasks involve a lack of communication between the operator and the rigging team or a failure to respect exclusion zones.

Environmental conditions also increase struck-by hazards. Poor lighting, noise, fog, or dust limit visibility and delay reaction time. During winter months, glare from lights or icy ground surfaces impacts workers and equipment operators.

Even with improved technology, such as cameras, alarms, and proximity sensors, struck-by incidents occur because the technology cannot compensate for a worker's lack of attention or unsafe positioning. These tools are effective, but they do not replace communication and situational awareness.

## Step up Struck-by Prevention

Most struck-by incidents occur when workers take shortcuts or try to save time. A few steps into the wrong area or a moment of distraction can have life-changing consequences. These events are preventable when the workplace implements best practices for safety, training, and prevention. When workers stay alert, confirm signals, and keep a safe distance from moving equipment, they significantly reduce the chance of being struck. Awareness is the strongest tool we have, and it protects everyone on the jobsite.

- Keep pedestrian walkways separate from equipment travel routes.
- Utilize trained spotters when visibility is restricted.
- Make exclusion zones large and clearly marked.
- Wear high-visibility clothing that can be seen from all sides.
- Confirm communication between operators and ground workers before movement begins. ■

## Work Zone Safety After Dark

Night shift construction changes how workers see, move, and communicate, and these changes create hazards that do not exist during daytime hours. Even routine tasks become more complex after dark because visibility decreases, environmental conditions shift, and workers naturally become more fatigued. Successful night work depends on recognizing these differences and adjusting procedures to protect everyone on the job.

When it's dark out, it's harder to see. Even bright lighting cannot fully replace daylight, and shadows form around equipment, materials, and uneven ground. Workers may misjudge distances, overlook hazards, or lose awareness of their surroundings. Proper lighting requires advanced planning and adjustments as work progresses. Light towers should be placed to eliminate dark areas, highlight walking paths, and ensure equipment operators can see their surroundings clearly.

Fatigue is a big contributor to nighttime incidents. The human body is less alert at night, especially during early morning hours when natural sleep cycles are strongest. Fatigue slows reaction time and reduces hazard recognition. Supervisors should check in with workers regularly, encourage breaks, and rotate tasks when possible to help maintain alertness.

Equipment hazards increase significantly at night when operators rely entirely on artificial light. The human eye has a limited ability to detect movement outside illuminated areas.

Because of this, workers must not assume they are visible and need to avoid blind spots. Reflective clothing is essential so that operators and spotters can quickly identify personnel.

Nighttime creates its own environmental challenges. Cooler temperatures may cause slippery surfaces, condensation, and fog or mist. Noise carries differently after dark, making it harder to identify the direction of alarms or equipment movement.

### Managing Night Shift Hazards

Night work can be performed safely when crews understand how darkness changes the job. Effective communication and pre-shift planning are the foundations of safe night work. Crews should meet before each shift to review lighting placement, equipment movement, blind spots, and expected changes in conditions. Workers should use radios when needed and rely on verbal communication rather than hand signals, except in truly well-lit areas.

The goal is to work safely through the night and ensure every worker returns home safely at the end of their shift. ■

## Stop Work Authority Empowers Workers to Speak Up

Stop Work Authority is one of the most important tools available to workers. Unfortunately, it is also one of the most underused. Many incidents occur because workers hesitate to speak up when something feels wrong. The purpose of Stop Work Authority is to give every worker the confidence and permission to intervene before conditions lead to injury, damage, or a near miss.

There are many reasons why workers hesitate to use Stop Work Authority. Some fear that they will slow down production, and others don't want to appear inexperienced or worry about upsetting a supervisor. While understandable, these concerns should never outweigh the need for safety for oneself or others. Speaking up demonstrates awareness, professionalism, and responsibility. It is not a sign of weakness.

Stop Work Authority starts with leadership. The first step is to clearly communicate that no worker will be punished or criticized for stopping work, and that when a worker raises a concern, supervisors must respond with respect, investigate the issue, and take the time needed to resolve it. When a Stop Work action is handled respectfully, the entire crew becomes willing to participate in hazard prevention.

Among UA members, there are many cases when Stop Work Authority has protected workers and improved operations.



Examples include workers recognizing a missing guardrail, identifying equipment that doesn't sound like it's working properly, or questioning a confined-space condition that seems unsafe. In each case, the worker's decision to speak up protected the entire crew.

### Build a Positive Stop Work Authority Culture

A workplace that supports Stop Work Authority:

- Encourages all workers to raise concerns without hesitation
- Reinforces that safety comes before production
- Responds to work stoppages with professionalism and calm
- Reviews the issue as a team to ensure understanding
- Resumes work only when all workers agree that conditions are safe

Workers need to hear and see that Stop Work Authority is respected by their supervisors and their peers. It should never be seen as an interruption, nor as an act of blaming someone else. It is about stepping back, evaluating conditions, and working together to solve problems—all essential for a strong safety culture. When workers act on their instincts and stop work, they protect their team, prevent injuries, and build trust on the jobsite. That's leadership! ■

## What Workers Need to Know About OSHA Citations

An OSHA inspection may follow a complaint, an injury, a referral, or be part of a programmed emphasis in a particular industry. When OSHA arrives on a jobsite, workers may feel uncertain about what to expect or how the process works. Understanding how citations occur and what rights workers have helps create a safer, more informed workforce.

An OSHA inspection typically begins with inspectors explaining why they are there and outlining the scope of the visit. Inspectors then walk the site, observe work conditions, speak with employees, and review records. Workers have the right to speak privately with the inspector at any point. This right is important because OSHA relies on accurate information to evaluate whether hazards exist.

Workers have several rights during an inspection, and it is beneficial to know about them.

- The right to speak confidentially with the inspector
- The right to have a union representative present during the opening conference, any interviews, and the closing conference

- The right to share concerns without fear of retaliation
- The right to review OSHA logs and injury records
- The right to participate in the closing conference if invited

### What is a Citation?

Citations occur when OSHA identifies conditions that violate safety and health regulations. Violations may involve issues such as fall protection, scaffolding, hazard communication failures, lack of machine guarding, improper energy control, or unprotected trenches. Citations are not accusations of intentional wrongdoing; they are official notices that conditions must be corrected to protect workers from harm.

When a citation is issued, the contractor receives documentation describing the hazard, the regulation involved, and the deadline for correction. Some citations include financial penalties, and some require immediate abatement. Correcting hazards quickly helps prevent further risk and demonstrates the contractor's commitment to safety. Multiple or severe citations may increase insurance premiums or influence whether owners trust the contractor with future projects.

Although citations are issued to contractors, they indirectly affect union members by influencing how much work a contractor can pursue. If possible, workers should communicate concerns about alleged violations or safety issues to the contractor first and allow them the opportunity to correct the hazards before involving outside agencies. When a company receives OSHA citations, it becomes more difficult for that contractor to compete in future bids, particularly against other contractors or non-union companies.

### Workers Can Help Prevent Citations and Boost Safety

In addition to protecting workers, consistent pre-task planning, reporting unsafe conditions, using the correct equipment, wearing appropriate personal protection equipment (PPE), and following lockout procedures all reduce OSHA violations. Near-miss reporting is equally important because it identifies hazards before they escalate into injuries or citations.

Understanding OSHA's role strengthens the safety culture on a jobsite. OSHA's purpose is not to stop work but to ensure workers go home safely. When workers know their rights and understand the inspection process, they feel more confident in speaking up, participating in safety discussions, and helping correct hazards. A well-informed workforce supports a contractor's compliance efforts and contributes to safer, healthier sites for everyone. ■

## HEALTH AT WORK



## Substance Misuse Prevention and Recovery in a High-Risk Industry

Substance misuse is one of the most complex and sensitive issues affecting the construction workforce. The United Association witnesses its impact on individuals, families, crews, contractors, and entire communities and is making a sustained effort to address the issue with compassion, education, and peer support services.

For decades, construction has consistently ranked among the industries with the highest rates of substance misuse. Construction workers are not inherently reckless or irresponsible, but the demands of the job create physical, emotional, and environmental pressures that increase vulnerability. Substance misuse is not a moral failing. It is a health issue influenced by pain, trauma, stress, isolation, and coping challenges. Recognizing this reality is the first step toward building a culture where workers feel safe seeking help and where crews understand how to support one another.

### The Unique Pressures of Construction Work

Construction work is physically demanding and can lead to chronic pain, acute injuries, and repetitive strain, along with wear on joints, muscles, and connective tissue. It is often medically appropriate for workers to use prescription pain medication after an injury. The challenge is that over time, a person may unknowingly and gradually form dependence on the medication.

In addition to pain, construction workers contend with other pressures, including:

- Irregular schedules that disrupt family life and sleep
- Long commutes or extended time spent traveling for shutdowns
- Job uncertainty during slow seasons
- Financial stress during layoffs
- High physical strain and fatigue
- Exposure to traumatic events such as serious injuries or fatalities

To cope with these challenges, workers may turn to alcohol, opioids, marijuana, or stimulants, which over time can turn into dependency.

### Safety and Performance

Impairment is dangerous on a jobsite. Construction workers need to make quick decisions, avoid heavy equipment, work

at heights, manage hazardous energy, and maintain constant situational awareness. Substance misuse negatively affects performance, even when a worker isn't visibly impaired. They can experience:

- Slower reaction times
- Poor motor coordination
- Reduced judgment, spatial awareness, and hazard recognition

Not only is the impaired worker at risk, but also every person around them. Many serious injuries have been traced back to an unnoticeable but real impairment.

Illegal drugs are not the only problem. Prescription medications, certain muscle relaxers, anxiety medications, sleep aids, and even over-the-counter drugs can affect alertness. It's important to take fatigue seriously as well.

### Recognize the Warning Signs

Coworkers often observe early signs that someone is struggling long before a serious incident occurs. Recognizing that these signs may be a problem can save lives and present an opportunity for early intervention.

Early warning signs that someone is struggling with substance misuse include:

- Frequent tardiness or unexplained absences
- Changes in behavior, mood, or attitude
- Declining work quality
- Difficulty concentrating or communicating
- Frequent complaints of pain or inability to sleep
- Smell of alcohol or marijuana
- Social withdrawal or increased conflict with coworkers

These signs do not guarantee that a worker is misusing substances, but they often signal that something is wrong. It's one thing to recognize these indicators, but workers need information about what they can do to help. The most effective approach is to express concern without judgment and encourage the individual to seek support from available programs.

### Why Don't Workers Ask for Help?

Many workers struggle silently because they fear being judged. They worry that asking for help means they will be seen as unreliable, or they'll lose respect, privacy, or their job. The construction industry values toughness, so workers may feel pride in handling problems on their own. Sometimes it's just a matter of not knowing what kind of help is available.

These barriers are powerful, which is why culture change is difficult, but so important. Workers need to know that asking for help is not a weakness. It is a responsible action that protects themselves and their crews.

## Prevention Strategies

Effective prevention in the workplace begins with education, communication, and reducing stigma. Workers need to understand how substances affect their bodies and that misuse develops gradually. Supervisors should receive ongoing training to recognize impairment, respond appropriately, and refer workers to confidential support services. Many unions and contractors now offer confidential and comprehensive support through counseling, referral programs, mental health services, and peer support networks.

Additional prevention strategies include:

- Having open conversations about pain and stress
- Promoting alternatives to opioid-based pain management
- Ensuring anonymity and confidentiality in reporting mechanisms
- Offering regular wellness and mental health check-ins
- Connecting workers with Employee Assistance Programs

## The Power of Peer Support

One of the most powerful forms of support comes from peers, especially those who have faced their own challenges, and training in how to listen without judgment and offer supportive alternatives. These conversations can break through shame and isolation, two significant barriers to recovery. Peer allies can encourage coworkers to seek professional help and provide accountability and support through recovery, so no one ever feels alone in their struggle.

A supportive crew culture reduces stigma and increases the likelihood that workers will seek help before their situation becomes dangerous.

## People Have Success with Recovery

Substance misuse is treatable, and recovery is achievable. Thousands of construction workers have successfully overcome dependence and returned to work healthier, safer, and more confident. Recovery may involve counseling, medical treatment, support groups, lifestyle changes, or inpatient care, depending on individual needs.

The most successful recoveries happen when workers feel supported, not punished. When a union or employer provides clear pathways to assistance, workers are more likely to act early and avoid crises. Many workers describe recovery as a turning point that strengthened their careers and relationships.

## Building a Culture of Compassion and Accountability

Addressing substance misuse requires compassion to ensure that workers feel supported and accountability for upholding safety standards. These principles work together to protect workers, crews, and the integrity of the trade.

In a supportive and accountable culture:

- Workers know how to report concerns confidentially
- Supervisors respond to concerns with empathy
- Programs are available for treatment and support
- Impairment is treated as a safety issue, not a moral failing
- Workers returning from treatment receive guidance and mentorship

A strong safety culture recognizes that substance misuse affects performance and puts entire crews at risk, while also acknowledging the humanity and complexity of each worker's situation.

## The Path Forward

Construction is a demanding, stressful environment, and workers deserve support that reflects those realities. Substance misuse can happen to anyone. It does not discriminate on the basis of age, trade, experience, or character. What matters is how the industry responds.

At the United Association, we are acting on many fronts. Our master trainer, Aaron Kiesling from Local 8, is currently revamping our 2170 Opioids in Construction course into a broader Substance Abuse in Construction curriculum. This update will benefit students by addressing a wider range of topics. It will also pair perfectly with the VitalCog workshop and Mental Health Literacy courses 2171 and 2172.

When workers realize they are not alone, recovery becomes possible. When crews come together with compassion and awareness, safety improves. And when the industry invests in prevention and supports the long-term health of our workforce, everyone benefits. Substance misuse is a challenge that can be overcome when workers, unions, and employers stand united. ■

## How to Support Mental Wellness for Traveling Workers

With long travel assignments, seasonal layoffs, physical fatigue, irregular schedules, and exposure to traumatic incidents, the construction industry takes its toll on workers' mental health. This is particularly noticeable during the winter months. Shorter daylight hours, colder weather, separation from family, and holiday pressures combine to cause shifts in mood, motivation, and energy level.

In this feature article, we are extensively exploring the realities of seasonal depression, social isolation, and the mental health challenges unique to the traveling construction work-

force. We're also providing guidance on prevention, resources, and the importance of creating a workplace culture where workers feel safe asking for help.

## Understanding Seasonal Affective Disorder and the Winter Slowdown

Seasonal Affective Disorder, commonly called SAD, is a form of depression that cycles with the seasons. The Mayo Clinic explains that symptoms typically begin in the fall and continue throughout winter. Construction workers are especially vulnerable because their work depends heavily on daylight and weather conditions. With shorter days and lower temperatures, workers may have:

- Less energy and motivation
- Difficulty waking up
- Feelings of sadness or irritability
- Trouble concentrating
- Increased fatigue
- Withdrawal from social interaction

These symptoms also affect personal well-being and workplace safety. A worker who feels mentally drained may be less attentive, less responsive, and more prone to errors.

Winter can also mean layoffs or reduced hours, and with that comes financial strain, stress, and anxiety. Some workers worry about supporting their families during slower months, while others take travel assignments that require extended periods away from loved ones. Both scenarios add pressure, heightening the emotional impact of seasonal change.

## Isolation Takes Its Toll

Shutdowns, turnarounds, and out-of-town assignments often require workers to live in hotels, rentals, or temporary camps for weeks or months. Without access to familiar support systems, they may feel disconnected from family and community. Loneliness is more intense at night or during off-hours when workers have limited social interaction, and can lead to depression, anxiety, increased alcohol use, trouble sleeping, lack of motivation, and relationship stress.

Some workers describe feeling like life at home continues without them while they remain "frozen in time" on the road. Others describe the stress of missing important events such as birthdays, school and sports events, anniversaries, or holidays.

This emotional distance can create tension within families as partners at home handle household responsibilities alone, and traveling workers feel guilt or frustration. Without ongoing communication, these emotional burdens grow heavier over time.

## Fatigue Factors into Mental Well-Being

More than physical tiredness, fatigue is a combination of mental, emotional, and physical strain that builds over time.

In construction, fatigue results from long shifts, physical labor, irregular sleep schedules, and stress. Night shifts, early morning starts, and extended commutes intensify the condition.

As fatigue reduces the ability to manage stress, it can manifest as increased irritability, emotional extremes, and reduced concentration. It also contributes to anxiety or depression. When fatigue combines with isolation, winter conditions, and pressure to perform, workers may feel overwhelmed.

## The Connection Between Mental Health and Jobsite Safety

Workers experiencing emotional distress, including fatigue, may struggle to focus on tasks, communicate effectively, or respond quickly to changes in the environment. Mental health challenges can compromise hazard recognition, decision-making, and the ability to follow established procedures. None of these challenges are ideal for maintaining jobsite safety.

In their study, "Pathway to Enhancing Safety Behavior of Construction Workers Through Subjective Well-being," available from the National Library of Medicine, Liu Q, Zhang L, Li Y highlight that workers with untreated depression or chronic stress:

- Are more likely to experience near misses
- Have increased risk of injury
- Demonstrate reduced situational awareness
- Report more sleep disturbances
- Experience higher turnover and absenteeism

These findings reinforce the need for employers and unions to treat mental health as a central part of workplace safety.

## How to Recognize When a Coworker is Struggling

While construction workers demonstrate a high level of resilience and strength, the associated culture of pride and fear of stigma can prevent someone who is struggling from masking emotional pain. Signs that a coworker may need help include:

- Changes in behavior or mood
- Loss of interest in activities they normally enjoy
- Distracted or withdrawn behavior
- Noticeable fatigue or trouble sleeping
- Increased irritability or frustration
- Decline in work performance
- Talking about hopelessness or feeling overwhelmed
- Increased alcohol use or other changes in habits

These signs do not always indicate a mental health condition, but they are worth compassionate attention.

## Make a Connection

Sometimes the most powerful thing someone can do is start a simple conversation. When workers feel seen and valued,



trust improves and isolation wanes. Crews benefit from leaders and coworkers who take time to check in, especially during long travel assignments.

These small acts can make a significant difference in how someone feels.

- Ask how someone is doing.
- Offer a listening ear.
- Invite a coworker to join a meal or activity.
- Encourage breaks during stressful days.
- Support coworkers during difficult seasons.

## Practical Mental Wellness Steps

Practical, actionable solutions are the most helpful. The following strategies can help workers maintain mental well-being during winter or extended travel assignments.

- Maintain a consistent sleep routine whenever possible.
- Participate in the peer ally program.
- Spend time outdoors during daylight hours.
- Stay physically active to improve mood and energy.
- Connect regularly with family and friends through calls or video chats.
- Limit alcohol use, especially when feeling overwhelmed.
- Build routines that create a sense of stability while on the road.
- Seek support early when stress feels unmanageable.
- Use Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) or counseling services as preventive care.

It helps to think of mental health as we think about safety: addressing a small issue early can prevent bigger challenges later.

## Employers and Unions Have an Important Role

A supportive workplace culture helps reduce mental health stigma and encourages workers to seek help early. Employers and unions are essential in creating this type of environment.

Effective employer strategies:

- Offer training to help supervisors recognize stress and fatigue.
- Provide private spaces for workers to make phone calls to family.
- Promote Employee Assistance Programs.
- Ensure workers have access to mental health resources.
- Encourage crews to take breaks and manage fatigue.
- Incorporate winter wellness campaigns into annual safety plans.

The United Association continues to emphasize the importance of wellness through programs such as Pipe PALS and mental health partnerships.

## Create a Network of Employee Assistance Program Information

One of the most valuable resources available to workers is an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). EAPs provide confidential support, counseling, crisis intervention, and referrals for mental health or substance misuse concerns. Locals typically work with regionally relevant providers and may offer unique services.

The United Association is working to compile a comprehensive list of EAP resources available from locals throughout our organization so traveling members can access support wherever they are working. Locals are encouraged to help build this database by sharing their EAP information with Pipe PALS: [pipepals@uanet.org](mailto:pipepals@uanet.org)

By contributing to this list, locals strengthen mental health support across the entire union and ensure workers never feel alone, no matter where they travel. One of the goals of the Pipe PALS is to share best practices, and having a resource list of available EAPs will be valuable for those who do not have one to utilize as a reference. This reference list will be available on our Pipe PALS website.

## Reduce Stigma and Encourage Honest Dialogue

The greatest barrier to mental health support is stigma. Many workers believe admitting emotional pain means admitting weakness. This belief needs to change. Seeking help is a responsible and courageous act, not a failure. A strong worker protects their safety, their health, and their family by addressing concerns early.

Creating a culture where workers feel comfortable speaking openly about mental health requires:

- Leadership that models openness
- Training that emphasizes empathy
- Supervisors who listen without judgment
- Peer advocates who share their stories
- EAPs that protect privacy
- Zero tolerance for harassment or ridicule

When mental health becomes as common to talk about as physical health, the entire workforce benefits.

## Positive Changes for a Better Future

For construction workers at every level of experience and in every region, the challenges of seasonal depression, isolation, and travel are real. They are manageable when workers have access to resources, support, and strong community connections.

The path to improving mental wellness related to seasonal and travel effects in construction is clear but requires strong leadership and action.

- Raise awareness
- Intervene early

- Communicate openly
- Provide EAP resources
- Secure commitment from all levels of the union and employer community

Workers should never feel alone during the toughest months of the year. By supporting one another and encouraging open communication, the construction industry can reduce risk, save lives, and strengthen the well-being of every person on the job. Mental health is the foundation of a strong, resilient, and healthy workforce. ■

## Pipe PALS: A Union-Wide Culture of Care, Prevention, and Peer Support

The United Association Pipe PALS wellness poster spells out that the program is built on a foundation of care, prevention, support, and inclusion. The Pipe PALS initiative and its guiding principles shape a vision for a safer, healthier, and more compassionate union, one where no member faces mental health or substance misuse struggles alone.

The initiative's core mission reminds us that Pipe PALS is here to establish teams of peer allies equipped with tools and resources to help save lives, reduce risk, and improve the well-being of members who may be struggling. Their charge is to ensure that every member feels seen, valued, and connected. This message emphasizes that mental health is a pillar of safety, not a separate concern.

The poster divides program commitments into key elements outlining how locals can elevate mental health awareness and demonstrate visible support for the effort.

- **Leadership Accountability**  
Pipe PALS encourages leaders to model mental health awareness, integrate wellness into decision-making, and communicate that workers can openly discuss mental health without stigma. These principles reinforce the idea that wellness is a shared responsibility at every level of the United Association.
- **Community and Peer Advocacy**  
Locals can leverage the Pipe PALS network to create safe spaces for conversation, connection, and support. By celebrating stories of resilience and expanding mental health advocacy training, members are empowered to look out for one another and elevate awareness in their local unions.
- **A Culture of Care and Support**  
Healthy United Association communities openly discuss

mental health without shame. Members should feel encouraged to prioritize their well-being and support their peers during difficult times. Stronger connections within local union communities build resilience and reduce isolation.

- **Proactive Prevention**  
Early access to mental health resources, training, and information is essential. Members and leaders are encouraged to recognize signs of mental health struggles, substance misuse, addiction, and crisis situations. Prevention begins with awareness and continues through early intervention.
- **Accessibility and Inclusivity**  
Ensuring that all members can access mental health resources is a top priority. The wellness poster includes QR codes linking to Pipe PALS information, making support tools easy to access on and off the jobsite.
- **Education and Training**  
Pipe PALS promotes expanded training through programs such as VitalCog. These trainings equip members with skills to identify stress, support peers, manage emotional challenges, and intervene effectively during a crisis.

In his Pipe PALS wellness letter, the United Association General President further reinforces these commitments. He emphasizes that Pipe PALS is already strengthening our culture of care, but he also stresses that the program's success depends on visible, consistent support from every local. He calls on each local union hall and training center to proudly frame and display the Pipe PALS wellness poster in a prominent location.

This action is more than symbolic. Displaying the poster where members gather normalizes wellness conversations and demonstrates that the local stands united in support of mental health awareness. General President McManus also encourages locals to email a photo of their posted display to Pipe PALS so that these images can be shared across the organization's communication platforms. Together, we are showing strength and solidarity, and reinforcing to members nationwide that wellness is a shared priority.

General President McManus also invites locals to contact [pipepals@uanet.org](mailto:pipepals@uanet.org) with questions or requests for additional materials.



United Association leadership is committed to every local having the resources they need to support members' mental and emotional health.

Together, the Pipe PALS poster and the General President's letter are a unified call to action. They remind us that our strength as a union is measured not only by our work on job-sites, but also by how we support and care for one another. Mental health challenges affect members at every level of experience, in every region, and across every sector of the industry. Through Pipe PALS, the UA strengthens its safety culture and reaffirms its commitment to protecting the lives, dignity, and well-being of every member.

The wellness poster is a visual reminder and a symbol of our collective promise that no member will navigate life's challenges alone. ■

#### Calling on All Locals

Display the Pipe PALS wellness poster to support the program, help break down barriers, reduce stigma, and make it clear that wellness is central to our identity as United Association members. Send your poster display photos or request additional resources at [pipepals@uanet.org](mailto:pipepals@uanet.org).

## Safety Awareness Dates and Events for Your Calendar

### February

[American Heart Month](#)

[National Burn Awareness Week](#)

[National Donor Day](#)

### March

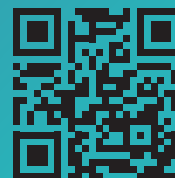
[National Ladder Safety Month](#)

[National Nutrition Month](#)

## IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW NEEDS IMMEDIATE HELP

[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](#) or reach out to the Crisis Text Line by texting "HELLO" to 741741 to connect with a crisis counselor.



**988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE**