

TOOLBOX TALK #7

Alcohol, Substances & Mental Health



Let's face it - working in construction is not easy. Long hours. Physical pain. Stress at home. Deadlines. Injuries. Travel. It is a tough trade, and that toughness is something to be proud of. But sometimes, that pressure builds up. And to deal with it, some people start using alcohol or other substances - just to unwind, sleep, or push through the pain. Over time, that can affect your mental health, your safety, and your crew. We are not here to point fingers. We are here because we have all been there in some form.

How It Impacts Safety and Mental Health

Even off-the-clock alcohol and substance use can follow you onto the job site. It can:

- Affect your sleep, memory, and focus.
- Lead to more anxiety, anger, and burnout.
- Slow your reflexes and cloud your judgment.
- Put your safety - and your crew's - at serious risk.

And it does not just stop at safety. Over time, it can eat away at your relationships, your mood and behavior, and even your will to keep going.

Why Construction Workers Are at Higher Risk

The construction industry has some of the highest rates of alcohol and substance use in the country. Here are some contributing factors to why that is:

- **Physical Pain & Injuries:** This job beats up your body. Lifting, climbing, bending, crawling - it adds up. Many workers deal with chronic pain or job-related injuries and are prescribed medications like opioids. Over time, those can turn into dependency. **STAT: Construction workers make up 25% of all fatal opioid overdoses across all industries. (CDC)**
- **"Tough Guy" Culture:** In this trade, we are taught to "man up" and push through. Talking about stress or mental health still feels taboo for some folks. So instead, many bottle it up or self-medicate. **STAT: 63% of construction workers say stigma is a barrier to getting mental health or substance use treatment. (National Safety Council)**
- **Camaraderie & Substance Normalization:** Let's be honest - on some crews, there is a culture of "grab a drink after work" or party hard on the off days. That does not mean everyone has a problem, but it does make it harder to speak up when someone does need help. **STAT: 1 in 7 construction workers meets the criteria for a substance use disorder. (SAMHSA)**

GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. What is something you personally do to check in on your own mental health?
2. What is one thing our crew could do this week to support better mental health and reduce the stigma?

TOOLBOX TALK #7

Alcohol, Substances & Mental Health



Spotting the Signs

Sometimes the signs are subtle. Here is what to look for in yourself or a buddy:

- Coming in tired, irritable, or not fully “there.”
- Mood swings or snapping easily.
- Falling behind on tasks.
- Smelling like alcohol, or talking about drinking to cope.
- Withdrawing from others or seeming down.

Quick check-in - Just nod if you have ever:

- Seen a crew member struggle but were not sure how to help.
- Felt like you have pushed through stress without support.
- Used alcohol or something else just to manage pressure.

You are not alone - and those head nods around you prove it.

Self-Check: How Are You Doing?

Ask yourself:

- Am I drinking or using something to cope more often lately?
- Has anyone close to me expressed concern?
- Is my sleep, work performance, or mood and behavior suffering?
- Do I feel like I am keeping something bottled up?

If anything hits home - it is ok. And it is a sign you deserve support.

What Can You Do?

A simple thing to try this week is checking in with one person on the crew. Make the conversation intentional. Be present. Be real. Ask about life - the good stuff and the tough stuff. Because when we check in and genuinely care about what is going on in each other's lives, we show up for each other better and create a stronger, safer job site.

*We are in this together. And together, we are stronger. If you are struggling, speak up. If someone else is struggling, do not look away. **Because this is not just about being safe - it is about being human. And there is no job more important than your life.***

Who Can You Talk To?

- TEAM - Free and confidential support.
- Your foreman, safety representative, or business representative.
- Friends, family, or someone you trust on the crew.
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline - available 24/7 and is anonymous.

988 Lifeline

TEAM 1-800-634-7710

Additional resources can be found at www.northcountrycarpenter.org/mental-health