



# Safety News

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

Spring 2025 | Issue 32

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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 the seasons change and we welcome the longer days of spring, it's a great time to renew our focus on safety, both on the job and at home. Changing weather brings increased workloads, new projects, and evolving jobsite conditions. It's crucial that we stay vigilant, looking out for ourselves and one another to ensure that every worker goes home safely at the end of the day.

This season, let's reinforce the fundamentals—situational awareness, proper PPE use, and strong communication. Whether you're working in confined spaces, handling hazardous materials, or managing seasonal risks such as heat stress and increased jobsite activity, safety should always be our top priority.

As proud members of the United Association, we set the standard for excellence, not just in our craftsmanship but in our commitment to safety. We don't take shortcuts, and we don't compromise when it comes to protecting our brothers and sisters.

Let's take this time to refocus, recommit, and lead by example. Stay safe, stay sharp, and build a stronger, safer future together! ■

## Message from General President Mark McManus

Brothers and Sisters,

I had the opportunity to attend this year's Pipe Trades Training and Technology Conference in February. I spoke on the day the Pipe PALS Committee presented. I was touched by how candid our committee members were in sharing their stories about mental health challenges. I was equally impressed by the reception these stories received from the Training Directors, Coordinators, Business Managers, Organizers, Instructors, and other attendees. I want to thank the committee members for their dedication to these critical issues. Many members have stepped up to receive mental health awareness and suicide prevention training, Introduction to Peer Support Skills and Mental Health Literacy (Course 2171), and Advanced Skills in Suicide Prevention Training, Peer Support Skills, and Mental Health Literacy (Course 2172). I commend you.



*all for your commitment to your brothers and sisters.*

*When we decided to address mental health wellness within our organization, I knew that our membership would embrace it wholeheartedly. It's who we are. We care about our brothers and sisters who work alongside us. They are family, and as a family, we won't leave anyone behind. There is no shame in reaching out for assistance because there will be hands to meet yours.*

*I am equally impressed that our industry, including contractors, associations, and owners, recognizes the value of fostering a workforce that understands our commitment to mental health and well-being. I encourage all members to explore this training. Its impact extends beyond the UA and is incredibly valuable for our families, children, neighbors, and friends. Equipping ourselves with the skills to assist someone who is struggling can save lives. There is no greater tool, and there is no greater impact.*

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

April 15-17, 2025 ..... 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. .... Opa-Locka, FL  
 September 30-October 2, 2025 ..... 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. .... Dallas, TX

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

March 25-27, 2025 ..... 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. .... Cincinnati, OH  
 July 15-17, 2025 ..... 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. .... Opa-Locka, FL  
 November 18-20, 2025 ..... 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. .... Dallas, TX



## Conference Elevates Commitment to Construction Work Safety and Health

More than 500 safety and health professionals from the construction industry gathered at the 2025 Safety & Health Conference in January. Representatives from the Mechanical Contractors Association of America (MCAA), the United Association (UA), the Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors' National Association (SMACNA), and The Association of Union Contractors (TAUC) came together to invigorate their commitment to safety and health across the trades.

The UA showed up in force, with the most members attending, including UA Health, Safety, and Environmental Administrator Jen Massey and instructors from around the country. MCAA leadership welcomed UA brothers and sisters to the conference and highlighted the strategic partnership and collaboration between our organizations.

Education and training were key features of the conference. A highlight among the 35 hours of content was the passionate message delivered from the father-daughter duo of Brad Livingston and Kayla Rath, speaking on "The Ripple Effect" of jobsite accidents. Attendees were also treated to a special session by MCAA President Rick Gopparth, SMACNA President Tom Martin Jr, and TAUC President Justin Bruce.

Our profession is generous, as proven by the 30 pints of blood collected to help with the national

## TRAINING



### 2025 OSHA Outreach Training

**OSHA 510 Course 2150**

**OSHA Standards for the Construction Industry**

May 12-15, 2025 ..... 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. .... Ann Arbor, MI  
 July 14-17, 2025 ..... 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. .... Ann Arbor, MI  
 September 29 - October 2, 2025 ..... 10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. .... Online (Zoom)  
 December 8-12, 2025 ..... 10:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. .... Online (Zoom)

**OSHA 500 Course 2151**

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

June 16-20, 2025 ..... 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. .... Ann Arbor, MI  
 October 13-17, 2025 ..... 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. .... Ann Arbor, MI  
 December 8-12, 2025 ..... 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. .... Ann Arbor, MI

**2170 Opioids in the Workplace**

March 24-27, 2025 ..... 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. .... Online (Zoom)  
 October 6-9, 2025 ..... 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. .... Online (Zoom)  
 November 3-6, 2025 ..... 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. .... Online (Zoom)

blood shortage and the \$7,500 donated to the Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention, an organization dedicated specifically to our industry's men and women.

Attendees also interacted with 40 exhibitors, including Milwaukee Tool, Little Giant Ladder, Tyfoom, ClickSafety, DeWalt, Procore, Hilti, ServiceTitan, and many more.


MCAA continues to prioritize the safety and health of our workers, our teams, and our companies. We look forward to continuing our partnership and focusing on these priorities with the UA in 2026. Join us and mark your calendars now for the 2026 Safety & Health Conference in Austin, TX, January 12-15, 2026. ■



Until recently, the UA and the industry have often overlooked a significant part of health and safety—mental health. The UA Pipe PALS (Peer Allies for Life Success) program aims to assist our entire organization with mental health awareness and suicide prevention. The UA Pipe PALS Committee develops resources and training for members and cultivates a purpose and values that inspire new thinking and action. Pipe PALS is building a network of peer allies equipped with tools and resources to improve and save the lives of those struggling with mental health or addiction issues.

A peer ally is someone who offers support, understanding, and guidance to individuals who may be experiencing mental health challenges, addiction, or suicidal thoughts. Peer allies don't have to be licensed professionals but need to be trained in basic life support and empathy skills that foster a supportive environment. They offer compassion and encourage individuals to seek professional help when needed. Peer allies are often the first to notice if a brother or sister is experiencing mental health or addiction issues and can provide support and resources to those in need. Developing a strong peer-to-peer support system within the UA will ripple out to members' families and communities, plus the construction trades as a whole.

As peer allies, members contribute to the well-being of others while promoting awareness, acceptance, and support. Together, UA's peer allies can make a difference within the organization by reducing the stigma surrounding mental health, addiction, and suicide. We can remind others that it's okay to not be okay and promote both asking for and giving help as a way to save lives. ■

**HEALTH AT WORK** 



**Pipe PALS: Building a Support Network for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention**

The United Association in the U.S. and Canada is committed to the health and well-being of all members. Because our work environments can be dangerous, the UA prioritizes physical health and safety. Our industry-leading education and safety programs help members perform their jobs effectively and safely each day.

**Don't Miss Pipe PALS Mental Health Mondays on Social Media!**

Your mental health matters, and Pipe PALS is here to help. On January 6, 2025, we launched Mental Health Mondays, a new series across multiple social media platforms that provides support, resources, and honest conversations about mental health in the trades.

Follow, share, and engage with us every Monday because looking out for one another is what we do.

This initiative adds to the many ways we're working to let every UA member know they are never alone. Mental health is just as important as physical safety on the job. By staying connected and spreading the word, we can break the stigma together. ■



**Understand the basics of mental health and addiction**, including common mental health conditions, signs of distress and addiction, and how to discuss topics in a respectful, non-judgmental way.

**Practice active listening and empathy**, which involves dedicating your full attention, asking open-ended questions, showing genuine interest, and refraining from offering unsolicited advice.

**Foster a stigma-free environment** that normalizes open discussions about mental health.

**Respect member privacy** by keeping conversations confidential unless there is a risk of harm to the individual or others.

**Maintain boundaries** as an ally who offers support, not a counselor or therapist who is licensed to diagnose or treat mental health issues.

**Encourage peers to seek professional help** when your training tells you they may need more than you can provide. Suggest resources such as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), counselors, local support groups, or the 988 hotline.

**Know how to recognize and react in a crisis situation.** Be prepared to contact emergency services or offer a referral to someone at immediate risk of harming themselves or others.

**Take care of yourself** because supporting others can be emotionally draining. Seek support if you are overwhelmed or need guidance with complex situations.

## New Pipe PALS Webpage is Live and Loaded with Resources

The new [Pipe PALS webpage](#) is the go-to place for everyone interested in helping others who are struggling with mental health, addiction, or are exhibiting suicidal thoughts. Whether you're already involved in the peer ally program, interested in learning more about it, or wanting to educate yourself, you'll find comprehensive mental health resources, plus information about upcoming training sessions.



Access valuable resources to help you and your fellow members, including:

- Crisis Support
- Prevention
- Veterans
- Substance Use & Addiction Services
- Postvention Support
- Resources you can download, print, or order

Meet the Pipe PALS Committee: Learn more about who we are and why we're committed to this work.

Read up on best practices for local unions: Adopt practical strategies to strengthen mental health awareness in your local.

Request Vital Cog Training: If your local is interested in offering Vital Cog Training to its members, we encour-

age you to complete the submission form on our website. This streamlined process simplifies the training request and promotes taking an active step to protect our brothers and sisters both on and off the job.

Bookmark the [Pipe PALS page](#) and check back often. 

## Understanding Mental Health in the Workplace

In the construction industry, physical health is an obvious requirement, but mental health is essential too. Employees' mental state can affect how well they pay attention, react, perform their jobs, and interact with others.

Stress is big factor in mental health. It can show up in physical ways, such as muscle tension, headaches, stomach issues, high blood pressure, or heart disease. Over time, these can have lasting, harmful effects on workers and other people in their lives.

Some of the most common mental health struggles in a workplace are triggered by a traumatic event, substance abuse, or suicidal thoughts.

### Trauma

Sometimes an intense, shocking, or dangerous experience at work can lead to emotional, cognitive, behavioral, or physical changes. Examples of traumatic events include explosions, building or equipment collapses, abuse, or a coworker's serious injury or death. All sorts of feelings, from terror, flashbacks, anxiety, anger, or sadness, are expected. Trauma can also affect sleep and the ability to think clearly. While expected, if these symptoms continue for long periods, they may lead to acute stress disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which require professional help.



### Substance Use Disorder

People may develop a dependence on drugs, including prescription medications and alcohol, for many reasons, even when the substance may cause them harm or have other negative consequences. There are many reasons why this happens, including chronic pain, injuries, or an underlying mental health condition. Substance use disorder can be treated and controlled in a number of ways based on individual needs.

### Suicide

Suicide can touch anyone, anywhere, at any time, but there is help available to prevent it. Untreated mental health conditions can lead to suicidal thoughts and actions, so it is really important to reach out to anyone showing signs of distress. Educating and encouraging workers to reach out for help if they are feeling stressed, have experienced trauma, or are worried about their mental health or substance use is critical. Make sure that everyone knows about the free, confidential 988 suicide and crisis lifeline available 24/7.

Employers can do many things to inform employees about resources and change attitudes about seeking help. Ongoing workplace education, open conversations, and training on supporting others are all part of a culture focused on mental health.

You can find a wealth of workplace stress information and resources on the [OSHA website](#), including this [Workplace Mental Health](#) flyer.  

## UA Technicians Apply a Holistic Approach to Building Systems for Infection Control

The global COVID-19 pandemic raised public awareness about plumbing, air handling, and mechanical systems in buildings. This is good news for the UA: Journeyworker skillsets are more valuable than ever in helping to manage public health, infection control, and consumer confidence.

Pumps, fans, and compressors move water, air, and refrigerant through properties of all types, so building owners and managers throughout North America have a heightened responsibility for infection control. During normal operation, these systems can transmit disease to building occupants. UA workers are trained to use a holistic approach when assessing these systems and installing solutions.

Some of our best plumbing and mechanical system risk assessment tools are rubrics that incorporate the holistic concept that the whole is greater than the sum of individual parts. More informative than a checklist, the holistic rubric is a scorecard that combines several criteria to determine

performance levels. This method points to specific, effective infection control measures for a particular building and its occupants.

In addition to skill building in their given trade, the holistic approach teaches UA workers the vocabulary and behavior modifications that lead to effective infection control. By learning to balance execution, behavior modification, and appropriate documentation as part of everyday work, technicians are armed with credible solutions that build trust with customers.

### Goals for UA Service Technicians

Learn these essential concepts for effective infection control:

1. Identify the building air/water systems that need control measures.
2. Assess how much risk each piped system poses to the occupants.
3. Apply control measures.
4. Verify and validate actions taken.

### Practical Applications

Commercial and institutional facilities feature similar building water systems, comprised of a point of entry, cold and hot water distribution, ventilation and exhaust air fans, and sanitary waste. There may be additional features, such as fire suppression, decorative fountains, and ice machines. Technicians reference the control points mapped on the flow diagram to categorize the building's air and water system. Equipment and device selection is based on the complexity of the system's arrangement.

### A Recent History of Air Quality in Buildings

In the 1980s, health and safety experts attributed Sick Building Syndrome (SBS) to working or living in a building or enclosed space with poor indoor air quality, yet they could not pinpoint a precise cause. According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, about 30% of new and remodeled buildings have poor indoor air quality.

Diagnosing SBS can be difficult because of its wide-ranging symptoms that can mimic other conditions, such as the common cold, but increased ventilation resulted in decreased complaints. Until recently, bacteria and viruses were not included in the analysis.

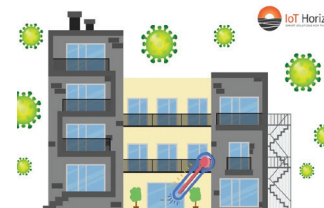
Fast-forward 40 years to our high-performance building environment. Managing a building is complex, with

many competing demands: health and safety, building maintenance, housekeeping, and communicating with occupants and tenants. Fiscal pressure to contain or reduce operating costs and increase revenues can easily draw attention and resources away from building management priorities such as indoor air quality (IAQ).

Compounding the complexity is the recent focus on comfort and satisfaction with indoor environmental quality (IEQ). Ihab Elzeyadi, Ph.D., University of Oregon, has identified biophysical factors, such as visual and thermal comfort, independently influencing an occupant's overall perception of spatial experience. The high-performance building industry now engages various consultants in an integrated design practice that aims to achieve a quality environment for the occupants and the planet.

This attention to IEQ has ramifications for mechanical systems maintenance standards as well, opening the door to recommissioning equipment, not only for increased thermal comfort but also for improved air quality. One example is the ASHRAE Position Document on Infectious Aerosols, released on April 14, 2020, to help quantify the risk of pathogen spread, specifically particulate settling, surface disinfection, and aerosol dissemination in the occupied space. Airflow patterns in a space can affect the number of people exposed, both positively and negatively. Looking at the various ways building systems impact health and safety, as well as comfort, is the definition of a holistic approach.

The ASHRAE document concludes that, "Various strategies have been found to be effective at controlling transmission, including optimized airflow patterns, directional airflow, zone pressurization, dilution ventilation, in-room air-cleaning systems, general exhaust ventilation, personalized ventilation, local exhaust ventilation at the source, central system filtration, ultraviolet, along with controlling temperature and relative humidity." These types of comprehensive measures require experienced tradespeople to support proper implementation. Look no further than the UA membership! ■



## SAFETY AT WORK



## Workers Have Rights for Workplace Safety

Employers are responsible for providing a safe and healthy workplace for employees. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) sets and enforces standards and provides training, education, and assistance for employers and workers to help keep everyone safe.

Workers have a right to safe working conditions, safety training and information about the OSHA standards that relate to their workplace. They also have the right to file a complaint asking OSHA to inspect the workplace, and to exercise their rights under the law without retaliation. More detailed information is available on the [OSHA Worker Rights and Protections](#) web page.

The following articles outline topics that fall under OSHA oversight. If employers or workers have questions or concerns about these topics, there is more information on the OSHA website, [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov), or by calling 800-321-OSHA (6742).

## Avoiding Amputations

One of the most serious and debilitating workplace injuries is an amputation. While manufacturing operations report the highest number of work-related amputations, they are widespread in the construction industry, too. Amputations occur most often when workers operate unguarded or inadequately safeguarded mechanical equipment, but there are many other scenarios involving materials handling, heavy equipment, hand tools, pinch points, falls, or crushing accidents. The most commonly affected body parts are the extremities, such as toes, fingers, hands, arms, legs, and feet.

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers must provide safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. [Title 29](#) of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) has several standards to protect workers from amputation in the workplace, related to machinery, safeguarding, hand and power tools, and more.

On a practical level, there are many actions employers can take to help control risks for workers. First is to

identify and manage amputation hazards, including those caused by mechanical components of machinery, mechanical motion occurring in or near components, and worker activity related to the mechanical operation. The most common mechanical motions that are potentially hazardous include pinching, rotating, reciprocating, transversing, cutting, punching, shearing, and bending. Learn more from the [OSHA amputations fact sheet](#).

By training employees and establishing safe work practices and administrative controls, employers can manage hazards and help prevent tragic injuries. [Machine safeguards](#) are a requirement, and most new machinery has them installed, but retrofits can also be purchased or constructed in-house. There are two main approaches to safeguarding:

- Guards that provide a physical barrier between the worker's body and the hazardous part of machinery. These need to be secure, strong, and tamper-proof without impeding the operator's view or work.
- Devices that prevent a worker from coming into contact with points of contact by interrupting the machine cycle or keeping the operator's hands away from the hazard. These also must be tamper-proof without impeding safe operation and machine maintenance.



## The Sneaky Killer: Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that is harmful to breathe. It is most commonly found in workplaces where internal combustion engines are in use. Workers can be exposed to harmful levels of CO in boiler rooms, warehouses, petroleum refineries, pulp and paper production, steel production, or around docks, blast furnaces, or coke ovens. Workers who are in and around motorized vehicles are also at risk.

CO displaces oxygen in the blood, depriving the heart, brain, and other vital organs. It can overcome a person in minutes without warning since the gas is tasteless, odorless, and colorless. CO poisoning can lead to loss of consciousness and suffocation or can produce longer-term damage to the heart and brain. Less drastic but equally serious symptoms range from headaches and fatigue to

dizziness and nausea. Workers should report any of these symptoms immediately, avoid overexertion, and talk to a doctor. If you suspect CO poisoning, move the victim immediately into fresh air. Call for emergency help and administer CPR if the victim has stopped breathing or administer 100% oxygen with a tight-fitting mask if they are breathing. Rescues should be handled with extreme caution to protect others from CO poisoning.

There are many recommendations for preventing CO poisoning in the workplace. Key actions include:

- Installing an effective ventilation system
- Prohibiting use of gas-powered engines or tools in poorly ventilated areas
- Maintaining equipment and appliances
- Switching to equipment powered by electricity, batteries, or compressed air
- Monitoring and testing for CO
- Using the correct PPE when CO cannot be avoided
- Educating workers about CO sources and how to prevent exposure
- Encouraging workers to look for and report ventilation problems or other CO risks

For more details about CO poisoning prevention and OSHA standards, read this [fact sheet](#). ■

## Emergency Exit Essentials

Emergency exits are one of those things that we often don't think about until we need them. On every jobsite, it's really important to have permanent exit routes that are clearly marked and well communicated to all employees.

An exit route includes the access, the exit itself, and the discharge that leads outside. A workplace must have at least two exit routes, or more if two is not enough for all employees to evacuate safely. This depends on the number of employees, size of the building, or arrangement of the workplace.

The [emergency exit route fact sheet](#) from OSHA details design, construction, and emergency planning requirements for exit routes and discharges, including height and width of doorways, types of doors, fire defense considerations, load requirements, and where the exit leads.

Keeping exit routes safe includes planning and ongoing maintenance. They should be well-lit and clearly marked with no hazardous materials or obstructions along the route. Doors and emergency safeguards must be maintained at all times, even during construction.

Employers with 10 or more employees need to provide a written emergency action plan; with 10 or fewer employees, the plan may be communicated verbally. Plans should include evacuation procedures in case of fire or other emergencies. More detailed information is listed in the OSHA fact sheet linked above.

You may also find more information on exit routes and related standards in Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)—[Exit Routes, Emergency Action Plans and Fire Prevention Plans](#)—and [OSHA Directive CPL 2-1.037, Compliance Policy for Emergency Action Plans and Fire Prevention Plans](#). Compliance with the National Fire Protection Association's [Life Safety Code](#) also applies. ■

## The Worker's Role in Reporting

Employers are required to notify OSHA when a worker suffers a work-related fatality, inpatient hospitalization, amputation, or loss of an eye. It's not just about paperwork—keeping records helps identify safety issues and trends for accountability, planning, and employee information.



Reporting work-related injuries or illnesses is an employee's right, and it's also the key to successful health and safety programs. Employees should:

- Use the personal protective equipment (PPE) required for their job.
- Complete job-related safety training.
- Speak up about hazards.
- Report injuries and illnesses and encourage coworkers to do the same.
- Participate in safety discussions.
- Learn more about OSHA's Injury and Illness Recordkeeping and Reporting Requirements. ■



**Stop Work Authority is a Safety Foundation**



OSHA's General Duty Clause requires employers to provide a workplace free from recognized hazards and strongly promotes "Stop Work Authority" (SWA), allowing employees to stop work if they perceive it as an immediate danger or safety risk. SWA is considered a best practice for any company's workplace safety procedures. By allowing any team member, regardless of their position, to stop work if they observe unsafe conditions or behavior, SWA is designed to prevent incidents, accidents, injuries, and potentially life-threatening situations before they happen.

SWA creates a culture of safety by reinforcing that everyone on site is accountable, and that safety is more important than productivity, schedules, or profits. Each team member is expected to recognize hazards, speak up immediately when they see something that seems unsafe, and respect others when they use SWA. The goal is for everyone to participate in making a safer workplace.

**Stop Work Authority Steps:**

- Notice a potential hazard and assess the risk.
- Communicate your concern to those around you and ask them to stop work if necessary.
- Notify the supervisor or safety manager about the hazard and any actions taken.
- Work with safety personnel and the team to assess and make needed changes.

**Safety Awareness Dates and Events for Your Calendar**

**U.S.**

- **March**

[Workplace Eye Wellness Month](#)

[National Ladder Safety Month](#)

- Resume work safely when the hazard is addressed and the supervisor gives the okay.

SWA is a part of our "safety first" duty to ensure that everyone returns home in the same condition in which they arrived. It's natural to feel hesitant about speaking up to stop work, and to be concerned about productivity, peer pressure, or repercussions. Employers need to reassure workers that the company is fully committed to SWA without penalties as a path to a safe and successful future. ■

**If you or someone you know needs immediate help, please contact:**



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