WEEK 47 EARLY DECEMBER · ~5 MIN READ · ONTARIO CONSTRUCTION

# Year-End Burnout, Winter Blues & Mental Health

By early December a lot of crews are running on fumes. Fall is the busy season — the push to close jobs before the ground freezes — and it stacks long weeks one on another right as the days get short and the cold sets in. Worn down and stretched thin is how good workers start missing things. That's a safety problem, and most of the levers belong to the company, not to the individual.

## The hazard

This time of year wears on people in several ways at once. A long push leaves crews genuinely short on recovery. Less daylight drags on mood and energy for a lot of people. The cold adds to it, and the holidays bring money and family pressure that people tend to carry quietly. Someone worn down reacts slower, misses hazards, and makes worse calls around equipment, heights, and traffic — which is a risk to them and to whoever's working beside them.

## What the company does first

- **Look at the workload before looking at the worker.** Overtime, shift length, and who's assigned the high-consequence tasks are scheduling decisions. Pace the year-end push, and move demanding work to the part of the day and week when people are freshest.
- **Reassign without a fuss when someone says they're not up to a task today.** That has to be an ordinary conversation with no penalty attached — the moment it costs someone, people stop telling you, and then you're guessing.
- **Sort out getting home.** If someone shouldn't be driving, that's a ride, a rest, or somewhere to stay — arranged, not left to them at the gate.
- **Make the private route obvious.** Everyone should know how to raise something quietly — to a supervisor, or straight to your EAP or benefits plan if you'd rather not go through the company at all. **A group toolbox talk is not the place anyone should have to disclose anything.**

## What helps individually

- **Protect your recovery.** Real rest between long weeks is what keeps judgement and reaction time from sliding; it isn't time lost.
- **Get daylight where you can**, especially earlier in the day.
- **Eat properly and go easy on the energy drinks** — the crash lands hard by mid-afternoon.
- **Check in on each other.** If someone seems different — quieter, shorter-tempered, withdrawn, making mistakes they never make — ask how they're doing, one to one, and actually wait for the answer. You don't need to diagnose anything; you just need to notice and ask.
- **If things feel worse than a rough patch**, talk to your doctor or use the EAP. **If anyone is in immediate danger, call 911 or go to emergency** — that's not overreacting.

## Watch out for

- Running on empty week after week and "powering through."

- Someone who's gone unusually quiet or withdrawn — that can be more than one bad day.
- Microsleeps or zoning out on the drive home. Pull over.
- A crew quietly absorbing a bad stretch because nobody wants to be the one who said something.

## Talk it over

- Are we pacing the year-end push or redlining it — and what would we move if we were honest about it?
- If you weren't up to a high-risk task tomorrow, who would you tell, and would that be a problem?
- Does everyone know what our EAP or benefits actually cover, and how to use them without going through anyone here?

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