WEEK 50 MID-DECEMBER · ~5 MIN READ · ONTARIO CONSTRUCTION

Working Safely in the Shortest Daylight

This is the shortest stretch of daylight all year. In much of Ontario the sun is gone before 5 p.m., so you start in the dark and finish in the dark. If the job needs light, hoping your eyes adjust isn't a plan — and the hi-vis that was fine in June is not what December after four o'clock actually requires.

The hazard

Poor light hides edges, holes, moving equipment, and other workers, and makes depth and distance hard to judge. Drivers and operators can't see people; people can't see backing trucks. Nearly all of it comes down to someone getting struck, or stepping where they shouldn't have.

What to do

- **Set the lighting up before you start.** Areas where people are working, and the routes to and from them, have to be adequately lit — so light the actual work *and* the paths to it, and get it on before dusk rather than after. Watch for a single bright source doing more harm than good: glare on one side and deep shadow on the other can hide a person or a hole completely.
- **Wear what Ontario actually specifies.** For anyone who may be endangered by vehicular traffic, the garment covers at least the upper body and is **fluorescent blaze or international orange**, with **two 5 cm yellow stripes** front and back (≥500 cm² of yellow on the front, ≥570 cm² on the back), **vertical and centred on the front**, a **diagonal X on the back**, and **retro-reflective as well as fluorescent**. **A fluorescent yellow-green vest doesn't meet the colour requirement** — check the gear rather than assuming a CSA class covers it.
- **After dark, the limbs matter most.** From the side, a plain vest is nearly invisible: you need retro-reflective silver stripes **encircling each arm and leg**, or equivalent side-visibility stripes of at least 50 cm² per side. At this time of year most of the shift is that condition, not the exception.
- **Keep it clean.** Dirty, faded, or torn gear stops doing the job it was bought for.
- **Get positive acknowledgement before approaching a machine** — an agreed signal back, machine stopped and secured per the procedure. Eye contact is not permission; it tells you only that someone glanced your way a moment ago.
- **Check the machine's warning gear works** — lights and beacons. Just don't rely on a reversing alarm being there: Ontario requires one on **dump trucks**, and anything else has one only if the manufacturer fitted it.
- **Keep headlamps and flashlights charged and on you.** A phone light is not a work light.
- **Put the high-risk and overhead work in the daylight you do have**, and leave the routine tasks for the dark end of the shift.

Watch out for

- Glare and hard shadow from one bright light — it can hide a person completely.
- **A summer vest with no arm or leg stripes** being worn on a 4 p.m. December shift.
- Burned-out worklights or a dead headlamp battery. Check them before dark, not after.
- Drivers who can't see you. Assume they haven't until they signal that they have.

Talk it over

- Is our lighting genuinely good enough for what we're doing after 4 p.m. — including the walking routes, not just the work face?
- Look at the crew's gear: right colour, right stripe pattern, and arm and leg stripes for the dark hours?
- When did you last check your headlamp battery and the condition of your hi-vis?

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