

Skilled Trades & Construction

Electricians, plumbers, contractors, and tradespeople

Professionals Program · The Recovery Files

Skilled Trades & Construction Recovery

Building a Foundation for Lasting Sobriety

You build things. You fix things. You work with your hands and take pride in your craft. Now you're rebuilding your life in recovery – and you're bringing the same skill, dedication, and work ethic to this job.

Construction workers struggle with substance use

1 in 5

Workplace deaths involve substance use

2-3x

Higher injury rates when using substances

You

Can build a life worth staying sober for

[§overview](#)

Why This Program Exists

Construction and skilled trades have some of the highest rates of substance use among all professions. The culture normalizes it. The physical demands seem to require it. The stress and pain make it feel necessary. But the cost is devastating – to your health, safety, family, and career.

This program addresses the specific challenges you face as a tradesperson in recovery. It's designed by people who understand job site culture, physical demands, irregular schedules, and the unique pressures of blue-collar work.

Unique Challenges for Tradespeople

- Workplace substance culture is normalized and pervasive
- Physical pain from injuries and demanding work
- Irregular schedules make meeting attendance difficult
- Job site changes frequently (no routine)
- Financial instability during slow periods
- Safety concerns when others on site are using
- Stigma around "needing help" in blue-collar culture
- Limited healthcare access for pain management

Strengths You Bring to Recovery

- ✓ Work ethic – you know how to put in the effort

- ✓ Problem-solving skills from your trade
- ✓ Understanding that quality takes time
- ✓ Learning through apprenticeship model (like sponsorship)
- ✓ Physical toughness and resilience
- ✓ Pride in doing things right, not cutting corners
- ✓ Practical mindset and common sense
- ✓ Brotherhood and crew loyalty

How to Use This Program

Complete the assessments

Understand your specific workplace challenges and recovery needs

Work through the modules

Each module addresses a key challenge with practical strategies

Create your recovery plan

Build a realistic plan that works with your schedule and work demands

Connect with resources

Find union programs, trade-specific meetings, and peer support

§modules

Navigating Workplace Substance Culture

Strategies for staying sober in trade environments where substance use is normalized

Understanding the Culture

Many construction and trade environments have normalized substance use. Beer after work, pain pills for injuries, using to manage physical demands – these patterns are often deeply embedded in workplace culture. Acknowledging this reality is the first step to navigating it successfully.

□ Reflection: How has workplace substance culture affected your own use? What patterns have you observed?

Setting Boundaries

You can't change the culture, but you can set personal boundaries. This might mean declining after-work drinks, bringing your own beverages, leaving job sites when substances appear, or finding lunch crews that don't use.

Strategies:

- Have a prepared response: "I'm good, thanks" or "I don't drink anymore"
- Bring your own non-alcoholic drinks to job sites
- Connect with one or two sober coworkers if possible
- Leave when substances come out – your sobriety comes first
- Consider job changes if environment is incompatible with recovery

□ Reflection: Which boundary strategies feel most doable for you? Which feel hardest?

Handling Peer Pressure

Construction crews can be tight-knit, and standing out as "different" feels risky. Guys might give you shit for not drinking, question your reasons, or exclude you from social activities. This is real, and it hurts.

Suggested Responses:

- →Keep it simple: "Doctor's orders" or "Health reasons"
- →Redirect: "I'm training for [activity]" or "Trying to get in shape"
- →Own it: "It was messing up my life" (if you feel safe)
- →Humor: "I did enough for all of us already"
- →No explanation needed: "Nah, I'm good" on repeat

□ Reflection: What responses feel authentic to you? What would you actually say?

Building a Sober Crew

You're not the only tradesperson in recovery. Find others – at meetings, through union programs, or by carefully testing the waters with coworkers who don't participate in substance use.

□ Reflection: Where might you find sober tradespeople? What first step could you take?

Pain Management Without Substances

Managing physical pain and injuries without relying on pills or substances

The Physical Reality

Trade work is hard on the body. Injuries are common. Pain is real. For years, you might have managed with pills, alcohol after work to dull the ache, or substances to push through the discomfort. Now you need new strategies.

□ Reflection: What physical pain or injuries are you dealing with? How have you managed them in the past?

Medical Support

Work with doctors who understand your recovery. Be upfront about your substance history. There are pain management options that don't involve addictive medications.

Strategies:

- Tell medical providers about your recovery FIRST
- Request non-narcotic pain management options
- Physical therapy and occupational therapy
- Anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs)
- Injection treatments for specific pain
- Get second opinions if a doctor pushes opioids

□ Reflection: Do you have a doctor who knows your recovery history? If not, when will you find one?

Alternative Pain Management

These methods take more effort than popping a pill, but they work without risking your recovery.

Techniques to Try:

Ice and heat therapy (simple but effective)

Stretching and mobility work

Massage and bodywork

Acupuncture for chronic pain

Proper body mechanics and ergonomics

Rest days when your body demands them

Swimming or water therapy

CBD products (non-psychoactive)

Mindfulness for pain tolerance

Physical conditioning and strength training

□ Reflection: Which pain management techniques are you willing to try? What barriers exist?

Injury Prevention

The best pain management is preventing injury in the first place. Recovery gives you the clarity to work smarter, not just harder.

Prevention Strategies:

- Use proper safety equipment consistently
- Don't work when exhausted (sobriety helps you notice)
- Speak up about unsafe conditions
- Warm up before heavy work
- Proper lifting techniques
- Know when to ask for help with heavy loads

□ Reflection: What injury prevention habits could you strengthen in recovery?

Recovery with Irregular Schedules

Making recovery work with changing job sites, hours, and unpredictable demands

The Schedule Challenge

Trade work doesn't follow 9-5 schedules. Job sites change. Weather affects work. Overtime is unpredictable. Emergency calls happen. This makes consistent recovery routines difficult but not impossible.

□ Reflection: How does your work schedule make recovery challenging? What's hardest about it?

Non-Negotiables

You need a handful of recovery activities that happen NO MATTER WHAT. These are your foundation when everything else is chaos.

Where to Look:

- One daily practice (morning reading, prayer, meditation - 10 minutes)
- Minimum weekly meetings (even if you have to find different ones)
- Regular sponsor contact (even if just texts on busy days)
- Daily check-in with yourself (HALT assessment)
- One recovery buddy you stay connected with

□ Reflection: What 2-3 non-negotiable recovery activities can you commit to regardless of work schedule?

Flexible Recovery Strategies

Build flexibility into your recovery plan to accommodate your work reality.

Strategies:

- Know meetings at multiple times/locations
- Use online meetings when job site is remote
- Audio recovery content during commute
- Lunch break phone calls with sponsor
- Weekend intensive recovery time
- 5am meetings before early shifts
- Evening meetings after late jobs
- Recovery podcasts during work when safe

□ Reflection: Which flexible strategies could work for your specific situation?

When Work Threatens Recovery

If work consistently prevents recovery activities, something needs to change. Your sobriety has to come first – not sometimes, always.

Questions to Consider:

- ?Can you adjust your schedule with your employer?
- ?Are there shifts or jobs that better support recovery?
- ?Do you need to change companies or trades?
- ?Can you reduce overtime temporarily?
- ?Is self-employment an option for more control?

□ Reflection: Is your current job compatible with recovery? If not, what changes are you willing to make?

Safety & Accountability on Job Sites

Creating accountability and safety practices to protect your recovery and others

The Stakes Are High

Trade work involves machinery, heights, electricity, heavy equipment. Using substances on the job risks your life and others'. Even using the night before can impair you the next day. The consequences are not abstract – they're concrete and immediate.

□ Reflection: Have you had close calls related to substance use at work? What scared you?

Accountability Systems

Build structures that keep you accountable, even when no one is watching.

□ Reflection: Which accountability measures would strengthen your recovery? Who could support this?

What To Do If Someone Is Using

If coworkers are using on the job, you face difficult decisions. Your safety and recovery matter more than being liked.

Your Options:

- Remove yourself from the immediate situation
- Report to supervisor if safety is compromised
- Document what you observe
- Refuse to work under unsafe conditions
- Know your rights regarding unsafe work environments
- Consider union representation if needed

□ Reflection: What would you actually do if a coworker was high on the job? What holds you back from reporting?

Your Professional Responsibility

Recovery enhances your professionalism. You show up on time, work safely, remember details, and take pride in your craft. This is who you are becoming.

□ Reflection: How has recovery already improved your work? What professional goals do you have in sobriety?

Financial Recovery for Tradespeople

Rebuilding financial stability and managing money in early recovery

Financial Damage Assessment

Substance use is expensive. Lost jobs, damaged tools, DUIs, medical bills, money spent on substances – the financial wreckage can be significant for tradespeople who rely on steady income and equipment.

Financial Assessment:

- Money spent on substances (daily/weekly amount)
- Lost income from missed work or job loss
- Legal costs (DUI, fines, lawyers)
- Medical bills from injuries or health issues
- Damaged or lost tools and equipment
- Vehicle costs (accidents, impounds)
- Debt accumulated during active use

□ Reflection: What's the honest financial damage? Don't minimize – write it down.

Early Recovery Financial Strategy

In early recovery, simple is better. Don't take on major financial changes while you're stabilizing. Focus on basics.

Financial Basics:

- Track where money goes (30 days)

- Basic budget: rent, food, gas, recovery, bills
- Stop the bleeding (no new debt)
- Pay critical bills first
- Small emergency fund (\$500-1000)
- Celebrate financial wins (first full rent payment, etc.)

□ Reflection: What's your current financial situation? What's the most pressing money concern?

The money you're not spending on substances adds up fast. Track your sobriety savings – it's motivating to see the financial benefits of recovery.

Daily substance cost × Days sober = Money not wasted

□ Reflection: How much were you spending daily on substances? Calculate your sobriety savings so far.

Career Advancement in Sobriety

Recovery opens doors professionally. Better attendance, reliability, safety record, focus, and reputation all lead to opportunities.

Career Opportunities in Sobriety:

- Certifications you can now pursue
- Foreman or supervisor roles
- Specialized trade skills training
- Starting your own business eventually
- Apprenticeship teaching
- Union leadership positions
- Safety officer or training roles

□ Reflection: What career goals become possible in sobriety? What would you like to work toward?

Blue-Collar Identity & Recovery Pride

Integrating your trade identity with recovery without shame or stigma

Trade Identity

You're an electrician, plumber, carpenter, welder, mechanic – whatever your trade, it's part of who you are. Recovery doesn't erase that. You don't become less of a tradesperson in sobriety; you become better at your craft.

□ Reflection: What do you take pride in about your trade? How does recovery enhance rather than diminish that?

Blue-Collar Recovery Stigma

There's a myth that recovery is for white-collar professionals or people who "can't handle it." That's bullshit. Tradespeople in recovery are everywhere – they're just not always visible because of stigma.

Remember These Truths:

- Recovery takes strength – the same strength you use on the job
- Asking for help is professional, not weak
- Union assistance programs exist for a reason
- Your hands built things – they can build recovery too
- Blue-collar work ethic applies to recovery work
- You're rebuilding your life like you'd rebuild a structure

□ Reflection: What stigma have you experienced or feared as a tradesperson in recovery?

Craftsmanship Parallels

Recovery and trade work share core principles: measure twice cut once, proper foundation, using the right tools, learning from mistakes, taking pride in quality work.

Trade Work ↔ Recovery Work:

Recovery is rebuilding from foundation up

You need the right tools (meetings, sponsor, program)

Cutting corners leads to collapse

Apprenticeship = sponsorship model

Daily maintenance prevents major breakdowns

Quality takes time and can't be rushed

Master craftsmen started as beginners

Pride in doing it right, not just fast

□ Reflection: How does your trade work inform your approach to recovery? What skills transfer?

Finding Your People

There are recovery meetings full of tradespeople. Find them. The solidarity of being with other electricians, welders, or carpenters who understand both your work and your recovery is powerful.

Where to Look:

- Ask at meetings if there are trade-specific groups
- Union halls may have recovery resources
- Men's stag meetings often have tradespeople
- Construction industry recovery programs
- Trade association assistance programs
- Early morning meetings (before work shifts)

□ Reflection: Where will you look for other tradespeople in recovery?

§assessments

Workplace Culture Assessment

Rate the substance use culture at your workplace (1-10, where 10 is pervasive):

[1-10]

5/10

What substances are most common at your workplace?

- ☐ Alcohol (after work)
- ☐ Marijuana
- ☐ Pain pills/opioids
- ☐ Stimulants (meth, cocaine)
- ☐ Energy drinks + pills
- ☐ Other

Biggest workplace recovery challenges:

Resources or support available:

My Safety & Sobriety Commitment

Why This Matters

In your line of work, substance use isn't just about you – it affects every person on that job site. One mistake can injure or kill someone. Your commitment to sobriety is a commitment to safety.

My daily safety commitment (what I will do every workday):

If I feel triggered at work, I will:

People who know I'm in recovery and will support me:

☐ I commit to leaving any job site immediately if my sobriety is at risk, regardless of consequences to the job.

Physical Wellness in Recovery

Current Pain/Injuries

Current Pain Management

New pain management strategies to try:

- ☐ Physical therapy
- ☐ Chiropractor care
- ☐ Massage therapy
- ☐ Acupuncture
- ☐ Stretching routine
- ☐ Proper lifting mechanics
- ☐ Anti-inflammatory diet
- ☐ Sleep improvement
- ☐ Rest days
- ☐ Ergonomic tools

Physical wellness goals in recovery:

§resources

Union & Trade-Specific Resources

Union Assistance Programs

- Most major unions have Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) with confidential substance use support
- IBEW, UA, IUOE, Carpenters, Laborers unions all have recovery resources
- Contact your local union hall to ask about assistance programs
- Many unions cover treatment costs through health benefits

Recovery Meeting Resources

- Look for early morning meetings (5-6am before work)
- Lunch meetings near common job site areas
- Men's stag meetings often have many tradespeople
- Online meetings for remote job sites or weather delays
- Weekend marathon meetings for intensive recovery time

Safety & Health Resources

- OSHA drug-free workplace programs and guidelines
- Workers' compensation and recovery
- Pain management clinics specializing in non-narcotic approaches
- Community health centers for affordable care
- Union health funds and benefits counselors

Financial & Legal Support

- Credit counseling services
- Legal aid for license or employment issues
- Bankruptcy counseling if needed
- Job training programs through recovery organizations

Crisis Resources for Tradespeople

⚠ If You're Struggling Right Now:

- Call your sponsor immediately
- Leave the job site if you need to
- Go to a meeting (any meeting, anywhere)
- Call 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline)
- Text "HELLO" to 741741 (Crisis Text Line)
- Your life is worth more than any job

Recovery is worth fighting for. Your trade is worth protecting. Your family needs you alive and sober. There are thousands of tradespeople building strong recovery – you can be one of them.

My Skilled Trades Recovery Action Plan

This week, I will take these 3 actions:

My biggest workplace recovery challenge and how I'll address it:

Date:

Signature (type name):
