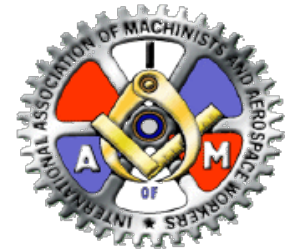




HELPING HANDS



Workplace Well-Being: Preventing Burnout Before It Becomes Substance Use

Compiled by ChatGP5

March is an ideal time for a workplace wellness check-in. The first quarter of the year is nearly complete, goals are in motion, and for many of us, the initial motivation of January has given way to mounting demands. This is often when **burnout quietly begins to take root** and unhealthy coping patterns, including substance use, can increase.

Understanding Burnout

Burnout is more than feeling tired after a long week. The World Health Organization defines burnout as an occupational phenomenon resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. Symptoms include:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Increased anxiety and cynicism about work
- Reduced effectiveness

Burnout does not happen overnight. It develops gradually often unnoticed until performance, mood, and well-being are significantly impacted.

The Link Between Burnout and Substance Use

When stress becomes chronic, the brain looks for relief. Alcohol, prescription medications, or other substances may temporarily reduce anxiety, numb emotional fatigue, or help with sleep. Over time, however, these coping strategies can:

- Disrupt sleep patterns
- Increase anxiety and depression
- Impair concentration and safety
- Create dependency to medications and alcohol risks
- Affect workplace performance and relationships



In safety-sensitive industries like transportation and aviation this connection is especially important. Fatigue and impaired judgment can have serious consequences.

Burnout does not mean someone is weak or incapable. It means stress has exceeded available coping resources.

Early Warning Signs

Physical Signs

- Persistent fatigue
- Headaches or muscle tension
- Sleep disruption
- Increased illness

Emotional Signs

- Irritability
- Hopelessness or detachment
- Loss of motivation
- Increased anxiety

Behavioral Signs

- Procrastination
- Increased use of alcohol or other substances
- Withdrawing from coworkers
- Decreased productivity



The earlier burnout is recognized, the easier it is to address.

Practical Prevention Strategies

Protect Sleep

Sleep disruption is both a symptom and a driver of burnout. Strive to have:

- Consistent sleep schedules
- Reduced late-night screen time
- Limiting alcohol as a sleep aid (it reduces sleep quality)

Build Micro-Recovery Into the Day

- 5-minute walk breaks
- Stretching
- Brief breathing exercises
- Stepping away from screens

Reassess Workload and Boundaries

- Clarify priorities
- Manage overtime work and build in down time
- Take vacations

Other Ideas to avoid burnout:

- Do not take on too much work
- Avoid “all or nothing” thinking
- Practice saying no when appropriate



Use EAP Resources Proactively

Employee Assistance Programs are not only for crises. Early conversations about stress, relationship strain, financial concerns, or substance use can prevent escalation.



IAM Peer Employee Assistance Program

The heart and soul of the District 141 Employee Assistance Program is the local lodge EAP peer coordinator. These dedicated men and women volunteer their personal time to assist other union members and their families who are experiencing personal difficulties. EAP peer coordinators do not make clinical diagnoses or clinical evaluations; they are trained to make a basic assessment of your situation and refer you to an appropriate resource for a more detailed evaluation. EAP peer coordinators will follow up to ensure you have been able to access services that addressed the difficulty you were experience

Burnout can be Prevented.

Begin preventing burnout by asking:

What is draining my energy right now?

What support do I need?

What one change would improve my well-being this month?

Burnout is preventable. Substance misuse can make burnout worse. Early awareness and small, consistent adjustments can protect both personal health and safety.

If you or someone you know is struggling with stress, emotional exhaustion, or substance use concerns, reach out to your Employee Assistance Program or a trusted support resource. Seeking help is a sign of strength not weakness.

IAM EAP Director, District 142

Paul Shultz

704-907-3563 E-mail: pshultz@att.net