Toolbox Talk - Protecting Critical Steps from Interruptions

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v2.0 | October 13, 2026 | 5–10 minutes plus field checks

What and why

Protecting a critical step means arranging time, coverage and communication so a person can complete an important action or review without routine interruptions. An interruption can leave the action and its record out of step. A sign helps only when people know what to do instead.

Objective: Demonstrate a routine-request route, an urgent-warning route and an accurate restart after an interruption.

When and where

Before a task segment where losing place could cause a consequential mistake or an unreliable check. At a desk, service counter, laboratory bench, workshop or field station, while keeping required monitoring effective.

How to use it

- Agree the protected step's start and finish. Name an available alternate for routine requests and tell affected people how to reach them.
- Use an understood in-progress signal. Keep alarms, stop messages, required monitoring and emergency access effective.
- Agree the procedure's safe pause and restart method. After interruption, establish actual task status before continuing or repeating an action.

Verify It in the Field

With no operational task underway, route a harmless routine request. Confirm the named alternate receives it; record any coverage gap.

Discuss and rehearse an announced urgent-message route without activating real alarms. Confirm the worker can receive the warning.

Interrupt a paper task between completion and recording. Ask the participant to preserve uncertainty and find the restart rule, not guess.

Failure points and stop triggers

Unavailable alternate; ignored sign; blocked warnings; conflicting assignments; restart from memory. Hold the affected step for unavailable coverage, failed warning communication or uncertain task status. Follow the approved safe response and resolve restart before proceeding.

Toolbox talk questions

1. Which step needs protected attention today?

2. Who receives routine requests during it?

3. How will we recover if completion is uncertain?

Use the separate supervisor field check and attendance sheet. Practice is not qualification or work authorization.

Source: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2, printed pp. 31. References and task-specific limits on the webpage.

Next step: Apply this skill to one step on the free JHA/JSA field-verification worksheet.

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/critical-step-interruptions-safe-restart

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