Toolbox Talk - Prioritizing Safety Improvement Gaps

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

What and why

Gap prioritization compares needed protection with actual conditions to decide what requires attention. Easy improvements can consume attention while a serious unresolved exposure remains.

Objective: Explain a priority using exposure and control evidence rather than convenience.

When and where

When several concerns compete for resources or an assessment finds recurring weaknesses. In team planning with affected workers and the people who can allocate resources.

How to use it

- Describe each gap in observable terms and identify who could be exposed.
- Use the applicable risk process and competent input. Address urgent exposure before ranking longer-term work.
- Assign correction, interim protection and follow-up. Keep unresolved gaps visible.

Verify It in the Field

Check the actual condition and governing requirement; do not infer protection from a completed action count.

Paper practice: compare a faded information poster with a required guard reported missing. Identify the urgent hold.

Name the evidence needed before closing either item. Do not invent a numerical risk score.

Failure points and stop triggers

Popular votes replacing risk review; unknowns scored as safe; quick closures without effective controls. Hold affected work for unverified required protection. Escalate uncertain consequences or inadequate interim controls to the responsible authority.

Toolbox talk questions

1. Who is exposed while this remains open?

2. What evidence sets the priority?

3. What will prove the correction works?

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. 112–120. 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/prioritize-safety-improvement-gap

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