Toolbox Talk - Decisions Under Uncertainty

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

What and why

A deliberate decision makes the goal, options, constraints and uncertainty visible. Pressure can make the first workable idea feel like the only choice.

Objective: Compare options against required constraints and identify when to hold or seek help.

When and where

When alternatives affect safety, a familiar solution no longer fits or evidence conflicts. At the decision point with affected workers and the required technical authority.

How to use it

- State the goal and non-negotiable requirements. Separate facts from assumptions.
- Compare feasible options, including holding or changing the sequence. Seek relevant expertise.
- Record the authorized choice, basis, controls and review triggers. Plan for an unexpected result.

Verify It in the Field

Confirm that the selected option meets applicable criteria and its required controls are verified before use.

Paper practice: a substitute item is available, but suitability is unknown. Identify the missing decision authority.

Explain why availability alone does not justify use. Record the evidence needed to proceed.

Failure points and stop triggers

Choosing before defining the goal; discounting contradictory data; trading away required protection. Hold when a required constraint cannot be met, suitability is uncertain or conditions invalidate the decision basis.

Toolbox talk questions

1. Which requirement cannot be traded away?

2. What evidence might change our choice?

3. When will we revisit the decision?

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. 63–65. 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/decisions-under-uncertainty-visible-basis

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