Toolbox Talk - Problem Solving with PACTS

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

What and why

PACTS organizes problem solving around Problem statement, Analysis, Causes, Testing and Solution. A quick fix can miss the cause or introduce a new hazard when the explanation has not been tested.

Objective: Separate a problem description from a suspected cause and identify a safe way to test it.

When and where

For recurring problems, unfamiliar conditions or troubleshooting within an authorized process. With affected workers and appropriate technical expertise, using safe evidence review.

How to use it

- Describe the gap without embedding a blame label or assumed cause. Protect people from ongoing exposure.
- Analyze evidence and compare possible causes, including facts that contradict each explanation.
- Test the explanation through approved methods, then choose and verify an authorized solution.

Verify It in the Field

For any physical test or change, confirm required authority, safeguards, method and acceptance criteria first.

Paper practice: deliveries are delayed; someone says staff need training. List other explanations and evidence needed.

State what result would weaken your preferred explanation. Do not perform a live trial for this exercise.

Failure points and stop triggers

Naming a cause too early; repeated trial-and-error; treating retraining as the automatic solution. Stop unapproved testing, repeated resets or changes with uncertain consequences. Keep the affected task on hold when protection is not verified.

Toolbox talk questions

1. Have we described the problem or guessed a cause?

2. What evidence could disprove our explanation?

3. How will we verify the solution?

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. 61–62. 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/problem-solving-test-explanation-before-fix

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