Toolbox Talk - Routine Work and Critical Steps

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

What and why

This skill makes a consequential change in familiar work visible before the next action. A familiar sequence can carry us past a changed step. Before work, make that decision clear in the approved instruction and setup.

Objective: Identify where a familiar sequence changes and verify an approved cue or check at that point before relying on it.

When and where

When today's sequence, item or prerequisite differs from the familiar task, especially after interruptions. At the decision point in any repeated physical or administrative task.

How to use it

- Compare today's approved instruction with the familiar sequence. Name the precise difference and the affected step.
- Use approved cues and place-keeping that appear before the decision. Do not add unofficial markings or alter instructions.
- Link the cue to a required check and hold condition. Keep safeguards effective even when the cue is noticed.

Verify It in the Field

Use two paper task cards differing in one prerequisite. Ask participants to identify the change before choosing the next step.

Check that the real approved cue is current, readable and available before the action. Record conflicting or missing information.

Verify the actual prerequisite with the governing criterion and safe method. Record the result; recognizing a cue is not a control test.

Failure points and stop triggers

Following yesterday's sequence; a changed condition buried in instructions; several similar labels; a cue seen too late; unofficial markings; a reminder mistaken for a safeguard; repeated alerts losing meaning. Hold for an unclear difference, conflicting cue, unknown prerequisite or lost step status. Use the task's safe-state and notification process.

Toolbox talk questions

1. Where does today's task depart from the familiar sequence?

2. Will the cue reach us before that decision?

3. What condition must be verified before the next action?

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

Source: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 1, printed pp. 2-21–2-23. 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/routine-work-critical-step-cues

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