Toolbox Talk - Resolving Competing Assignments

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

What and why

This skill makes overlapping demands visible so the responsible leader can allocate work and protection deliberately. Two reasonable requests can become unsafe when assigned together. Make the collision visible before accepting more work.

Objective: Reconcile competing assignments with the responsible leader and confirm that the agreed sequence reaches everyone relying on the work.

When and where

Before accepting added work, at a priority change or when required duties overlap. Across shifts, departments and requesters sharing the same people or resources.

How to use it

- List current duties, preparation, checks and follow-through. Explain where the new request overlaps them.
- Have the responsible leader agree a feasible sequence or authorized reassignment. Keep continuing protective duties covered.
- Tell every affected requester what proceeds and what waits. Confirm relief is suitable and available before handoff.

Verify It in the Field

On paper, assign one fictional person two tasks at the same time, including their required checks. Identify the collision and decision owner.

Ask affected people to repeat the actual allocation, deferred duties and timing. Record acknowledgments rather than assume a message was received.

Confirm promised coverage and required controls before revised work. Record the actual check and whether the change created another conflict.

Failure points and stop triggers

Several people assigning work independently; hidden preparation time; changing priorities without notice; a deferred duty left unowned; required monitoring interrupted; accepting extra work without checking its effect. Hold an added assignment when it would leave required protection uncovered or the priority remains unresolved. Follow the task’s safe hold arrangements and keep urgent warnings effective.

Toolbox talk questions

1. What work is missing from our list of commitments?

2. Who resolves conflicting requests for this assignment?

3. Who now owns the task that must wait?

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. 2-39. 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/competing-work-assignments-priorities

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