

Hazard, Error and Control: Agree What We Mean

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v1.0 | Reviewed October 9, 2026 | Discussion + field checks

Why this matters

When someone says the job is safe, what have they checked? Shared language helps a crew explain the exposure, the action that could go wrong, and the protection needed. Use one real task today. A useful explanation points to something the crew can verify, not just a reassuring word.

Objective: Describe one hazard, one possible error and one protective control, then identify evidence that the control meets its requirements.

Key hazards or failure points

Vague labels such as unsafe or careless; treating a reminder as physical protection; confusing a planned check with a completed check; assuming another person verified the control.

Practical controls

- Name the hazard: what could cause harm, who could be exposed, and during which step? Moving equipment, for example, creates a different exposure from a confusing instruction.
- Describe a possible error without judging the person: a missed handoff, wrong identifier or misunderstood signal. Ask what in the work could make that mistake easier.
- Name the control and its job. Explain how it removes the exposure, prevents contact or limits harm. Keep required safeguards in place; attention alone does not replace them.

Verify It in the Field

At a safe briefing point, ask a worker to connect the three parts: hazard, possible error and protective control. Resolve different meanings before using the explanation in the JHA/JSA.

Find the applicable procedure, manufacturer instruction, permit or other controlling source. Have the designated person identify the acceptance criterion and safe check method; do not create a limit in the discussion.

For the selected control, review the actual finding, checker and time. Observe what can be confirmed safely and arrange any required specialist check. Record VERIFIED, HOLD or N/A with a reason. A planned inspection remains unverified.

Stop and reassess

Hold the affected step when the hazard or required protection is unclear, evidence is missing, or a control fails its criterion. Keep people out of exposure. Obtain the required correction and check, then use the site's restart process. Calling something human error does not resolve the condition.

Ask the crew

1. What can cause harm in our example, and to whom?
2. What could make the intended action difficult or confusing?
3. What evidence supports the control we are relying on?

Use the task plan and required specialist decisions before exposure.

Sources: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2, pp. 128–130; NIOSH Hierarchy of Controls; OSHA Hazard Prevention and Control.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/hazard-error-control-shared-safety-language

Based on DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2 (June 2009). No claim to authorship or copyright ownership of original U.S. Government work. Todd Jerome Jenkins adaptation; no government endorsement implied.