

Pause When Unsure: Make the Restart Clear

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Why this matters

Something does not match: a label, an instruction, a result or another person's understanding. That uncertainty is useful information. Pause before the next action makes the situation harder to recover. A useful pause protects the work, brings the right help and ends with evidence that the concern has been resolved.

Objective: Practice explaining an uncertainty, maintaining the required protection and identifying the evidence needed before the affected work resumes.

Key hazards or failure points

Unexpected results; conflicting instructions; pressure to continue; concerns dismissed because of experience or rank; an unstable task left unattended; restart based only on reassurance.

Practical controls

- Say what does not match and identify the affected step. Follow the task's safe hold or stop method; do not improvise equipment movements or abandon a control that needs attention.
- Tell the designated leader and request the person who can resolve this question. Keep affected crews informed. Use the backup contact when the first contact is unavailable.
- Agree what must be established before restart: the governing instruction, actual condition, required check and authorized decision maker. Keep permits, isolations and other protections under their existing procedures.

Verify It in the Field

Before exposure, use a harmless example from today's task. Ask a worker to name the mismatch and point out the defined safe hold arrangement without operating equipment. Record the task, responsible person and protection that must remain in place.

From the actual work location, confirm the help route reaches the required role. Identify the backup and what information that person needs. Record the contact result and time; a name on an old contact list is not evidence of availability.

For a resolved concern, compare the correction with the current instruction and field condition through the authorized safe check. Record the source, actual result, checker and time. Ask affected workers to explain the revised step and obtain any required release.

Stop and reassess

Keep the affected work held if the uncertainty remains, the safe hold cannot be maintained, required help is missing or a check contradicts the proposed restart. Escalate through the site process. Do not experiment on hazardous equipment to find an answer.

Ask the crew

1. What mismatch would make you pause at today's next step?
2. What must stay controlled while help is coming?
3. What evidence and whose authority will make the restart clear?

Use the task plan and required specialist decisions before exposure.

Sources: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009 Vol. 2, pp. 16–17; OSHA Worker Participation. Full references and scope: webpage..

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

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/pause-when-unsure-safe-restart

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