

Choose the Gap to Fix First

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

Why this matters

An improvement list can leave a consequential gap waiting while easy items get closed. Start with actual exposure and missing protection. Separate immediate safety action from improvement priorities, then give the selected gap an owner and a clear result.

Objective: Describe one evidenced gap, justify its priority and define the protection, owner and verification needed to close it.

Key hazards or failure points

Choosing by popularity or convenience; vague problem statements; serious exposure left on a backlog; no decision owner; treating a purchase or revised form as the completed improvement.

Practical controls

- Describe the required or intended condition and the actual gap. Identify affected work, possible harm and existing protection. Keep urgent safety action separate from the discussion about which improvement project comes first.
- Use the organization's assessment process with the appropriate expertise. Consider the exposure, consequences and reliability of current controls. Explain missing evidence rather than inventing a score or assuming an undocumented condition is acceptable.
- For the selected improvement, name an owner with authority and resources, a due point and the field result expected. Keep other unresolved gaps visible with their protection, restrictions and review owner.

Verify It in the Field

Choose one real gap and compare its description with an authorized observation or current record. Confirm the location, affected activity and source of the required condition. Record the actual evidence and time without entering danger to strengthen the case.

Ask the decision owner to explain why this gap needs the proposed priority and what protects people meanwhile. Check that the assigned person accepts the action and can obtain required resources. Record unresolved dependencies and escalation needs.

Before marking the gap closed, have the proper checker compare the implemented change with its applicable criterion through the approved safe method. Record the actual result, checker and time. Ask affected workers whether the original difficulty remains or another has appeared.

Stop and reassess

Hold affected exposure when a required control is missing or unverified. Escalate if the improvement queue, budget or priority score is being used to justify continued unsafe work. Reassess the priority when conditions change or the evidence no longer supports the decision.

Ask the crew

1. What observable condition makes this gap important?
2. What protects people while the permanent action is pending?
3. What field result will show that the gap is closed?

Use the task plan and required specialist decisions before exposure.

Sources: Original exercise; DOE Vol. 2 topic reference, pp. 112–120; OSHA hazard-control guidance.

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

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/prioritize-safety-improvement-gap

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