

Safety Indicators: What Are the Conditions Telling Us?

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

Why this matters

Numbers cannot describe every work condition. More completed inspections may mean better coverage or faster paperwork. Fewer reports may mean fewer problems or a harder reporting route. Check what the measure represents before interpreting it.

Objective: Trace one safety indicator to its definition and field evidence, then identify the question or action it should trigger.

Key hazards or failure points

Counting activity as effective protection; changing definitions; comparing different work volumes; missing records; treating few reports as proof of safety; targets that discourage reporting or reward premature closure.

Practical controls

- Define the measure, period, included work and data source. Distinguish completed activities from verified results. Use information about prevention efforts alongside outcomes; neither type alone clears today's task for work.
- Check changes in workload, task mix and reporting access before interpreting a change in the number. Invite worker explanations and keep uncertainty visible. Do not claim a trend from a single unusual observation.
- Assign someone to review the evidence and the response needed. Use measures to improve conditions, not to pressure workers into silence. Keep required control checks and open restrictions in force regardless of the dashboard.

Verify It in the Field

Choose one reported measure and ask its owner to show the definition and underlying records. Trace a sample entry to its actual source. Record the period, scope and any missing or inconsistently classified information without exposing personal details.

If the measure says actions are complete, compare one sampled closure with its required safe field-check evidence. Identify the criterion, checker, actual result and time. An action marked complete after ordering equipment does not establish an implemented control.

Ask affected workers what changed in the work or reporting process during the period. Compare that account with the data and current controls. Record the follow-up question, responsible reviewer and response date rather than adjusting the explanation to fit a target.

Stop and reassess

Hold affected work for a missing or failed required control even when the indicator looks favorable. Escalate missing data, changed definitions or pressure to suppress reports. Do not alter records to improve a score; correct errors transparently through the established process.

Ask the crew

1. What does this number measure, and what does it leave out?
2. What changed in the work or reporting conditions?
3. Which field check would help explain the result?

Use the task plan and required specialist decisions before exposure.

Sources: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009 Vol. 2, pp. 77–79; OSHA Leading Indicators and Program Evaluation.

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

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/safety-indicators-field-evidence

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