

Competing Assignments: Agree What Comes First

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Why this matters

Two reasonable requests can become unsafe when assigned together. Make the collision visible before accepting more work. Agree who sets the sequence, who handles the deferred request and what protection continues while priorities are resolved.

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

Key hazards or failure points

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.

Practical controls

- List the assignments already accepted, including preparation, checks, records and continuing duties. Identify when the new request overlaps them. Explain the conflict using the actual work rather than simply promising to work faster.
- Ask the responsible leader to reconcile priorities with affected requesters. Agree an authorized sequence, suitable reassignment or deferred start. Keep required continuous duties covered; workers do not independently drop a protective responsibility.
- Make the revised assignment explicit: who does what, when it can begin and what must wait. Confirm any replacement has the required training, authority, information and availability. Revisit the decision when another request arrives.

Verify It in the Field

Use a paper example with two overlapping requests. Have the assigned worker include the checks and follow-through each needs. The leader identifies the collision and the task requirement governing it; do not create competing live demands to test someone's attention.

Ask each affected requester and any replacement to repeat the agreed allocation. Check that nobody still expects the original timing or assumes another person owns the deferred duty. Record actual acknowledgments, unresolved coverage and the decision time.

Before the revised work begins, confirm the promised person, information and required protection are available. Use the task's approved checks and criteria. Record the actual result, checker and time; review whether the change moved the conflict to another worker or later step.

Stop and reassess

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. Escalate unavailable relief, a new overlapping request or a changed deadline before relying on the revised allocation.

Ask the crew

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 task plan and required specialist decisions before exposure.

Sources: DOE-HDBK-1028-2009 Vol. 1, p. 2-39; HSE Workload; OSHA Hazard Prevention.

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

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/competing-work-assignments-priorities

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