

Hierarchy of Controls: Verify the Protection

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v1.0 | Reviewed October 6, 2026 | Discussion + field checks

Why this matters

A control listed on a JHA/JSA does not protect anyone until it is suitable, available and working. Use the hierarchy to improve the work, then verify the actual protection before people enter the hazard.

Objective: Identify one important control, explain what it must do and show evidence that it works.

Key hazards or failure points

PPE chosen by habit; a control listed but missing; a disconnected safeguard; a substitute introducing new hazards; a check that creates exposure; no response to failure.

Practical controls

- First consider removing the hazard or changing to a safer material or method. Where exposure remains, use suitable engineering controls, work practices and required PPE together.
- Assign a person to provide each required control. Identify its performance criteria from the applicable standard, instructions, assessment or approved design. Obtain expert input when needed.
- Plan a safe way to check performance and what happens if the control fails. Keep required protection in use until an approved change establishes the new arrangement.

Verify It in the Field

At the work location, name the hazard and point to what prevents exposure. Compare the actual setup with the plan. For a substitution, confirm the approved product or method and review its different hazards.

Have the appropriate person complete the specified inspection or function check. For example, compare a guard's installation with its instructions or read a prescribed system indicator. Never reach into machinery, bypass a safeguard or create an uncontrolled exposure to test protection.

Ask workers whether the control can be used throughout the task, including setup and cleanup. Record the control, source/criterion, safe check, actual result, checker and time. Missing criteria or evidence means the protection is not yet verified.

Stop and reassess

Hold affected work if a required control is absent, damaged, bypassed or outside its specified performance.

Reassess new materials, equipment or work conditions. Restore or approve suitable protection, repeat the relevant checks and brief affected workers before restart.

Ask the crew

1. Can we remove this hazard or reduce it at its source?
2. What evidence will show our chosen control is functioning?
3. What happens if the control fails halfway through the task?

Before exposure: connect every important control to observable evidence.

Sources: NIOSH Hierarchy of Controls; OSHA Hazard Prevention and Control guidance.

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

Expanded guidance, references, supervisor check and attendance record accompany this talk.