

Safety Capacity: Can the Controls Handle Today's Work?

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Why this matters

Adding work can stretch the people and equipment that maintain protection. A plan that worked for one crew may need changes for three. Check the busiest planned moment, not just the first task on the schedule.

Objective: Identify peak demand on critical controls and verify coverage before work increases.

Key hazards or failure points

One person assigned incompatible duties; shared equipment unavailable; replenishment or maintenance falls behind; backup assumed; technical capacity unknown; schedule pressure hides missing protection.

Practical controls

- List the activities expected to occur together and the resources each required control needs. Include other crews, breaks, handoffs, maintenance and emergency arrangements.
- Adjust sequence, staffing or equipment before demand increases. Use the governing design, permit, procedure or manufacturer limits. Do not substitute total headcount for the required trained coverage.
- Agree the backup or reduced-work arrangement if a key resource is unavailable. Name who can change priorities and which work must wait. Ask workers where maintaining protection is difficult.

Verify It in the Field

Walk through the busiest planned period on paper or from a safe location. Name who covers each critical role at the same time. Resolve incompatible assignments before starting rather than hoping the tasks will not overlap.

Compare actual available trained people and usable equipment with the approved plan and capacity criteria. Check condition and availability; a purchase order or someone scheduled elsewhere does not provide coverage.

Ask what happens if one person, tool or system becomes unavailable. Confirm the authorized fallback and who communicates it. Record demand, source criteria, actual coverage and unresolved gaps. Recheck when another task or crew is added.

Stop and reassess

Hold affected work for missing critical coverage, incompatible simultaneous duties, demand above an approved limit or an unknown required limit. Reassess control failure or an unavailable backup before continuing under a changed arrangement.

Ask the crew

1. What will happen at the busiest moment today?
2. Which control is stretched when another crew joins?
3. What work pauses if a key resource is unavailable?

Before adding work: verify the capacity to keep protection effective.

Sources: OSHA program evaluation, contractor coordination and hazard-control guidance.

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

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