



WHY SHORTCUTS ARE A SHORTCUT TO DANGER

Shortcuts often feel harmless. They save a few minutes, reduce effort, or help “just get the job done.” On site, however, shortcuts are one of the most common reasons incidents occur. Many serious injuries and fatalities happen during tasks workers have done many times before — when someone decides to skip a step, bypass a control, or do something “the quick way.”

This toolbox talk explains why shortcuts are dangerous and how small decisions can lead to big consequences.

Before Shortcuts Happen

Most shortcuts do not happen because workers want to get hurt. They happen because of pressure, familiarity, or the belief that “nothing will go wrong this time.”

Some common reasons shortcuts are taken:

- Rushing to meet deadlines or finish early.
- Believing the task is simple or low risk.
- Wanting to avoid extra effort or inconvenience.
- Thinking safety rules are slowing the job down.
- Overconfidence due to experience on similar tasks.
- Assuming supervision is not present.
- Believing “I’ve done this before and nothing happened.”

Understanding why shortcuts happen is the first step in preventing them.

How Shortcuts Create Danger

Shortcuts usually remove one or more safety controls that were put in place for a reason. These controls exist because someone was injured or killed in the past.

Examples of dangerous shortcuts:

- Not wearing PPE because the task will “only take a minute.”
- Using ladders instead of proper access equipment.
- Stepping over guardrails instead of using access points.
- Working under suspended loads to save time.
- Removing machine guards to make work easier.
- Skipping inspections or pre-use checks.
- Ignoring lockout or isolation procedures.
- Using damaged or unsuitable tools.

Each shortcut increases risk, even if it does not cause an incident immediately.

Why “Nothing Happened Last Time” Is Dangerous

Many incidents are the result of repeated shortcuts that eventually go wrong. Just because a shortcut worked before does not mean it is safe. Conditions change — equipment fails, weather changes, people lose focus, or something unexpected happens.

Relying on luck is not a safety strategy. When shortcuts become habits, the risk increases every time the task is repeated.

Choosing Safety Over Speed

Working safely may take a few extra minutes, but those minutes can prevent:

- Serious injury or death.
- Long-term health problems.
- Work stoppages and investigations.
- Disciplinary action or dismissal.
- Emotional and financial impact on families.

Taking the correct steps protects not only you, but everyone around you.

Discussion Points

1. What shortcuts have you seen on site that could have caused serious injury?
2. Why do you think people feel pressured to take shortcuts?
3. What can you do if you see someone taking a dangerous shortcut?

