Safety in Shutdowns & Turnarounds: High Risk Periods Need High Focus Meeting Kit



WHAT’S AT STAKE

Shutdowns and turnarounds are among the highest-risk periods in any facility. More workers on site than usual, more contractors who do not know your layout, more simultaneous hazardous activities happening in adjacent areas, and a schedule that puts constant pressure on everyone to move faster. The combination of time pressure, unfamiliar people, and overlapping high-risk work is exactly where serious incidents happen. The rules do not relax during a shutdown.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

The hazards that exist during normal operations become more intense during shutdowns. A few others only appear during these periods.

- Contractors and temporary workers who do not know your site layout, your permit system, or where emergency equipment is located
- Multiple crews doing confined space entry, hot work, electrical isolation, and heavy lifts in adjacent areas at the same time
- Extended shift hours over multiple consecutive days that degrade attention
- Equipment, materials, and scaffolding accumulating rapidly in shared spaces, blocking walkways and emergency exits
- Everyone operating under time pressure, which makes shortcuts feel justified

The Most Dangerous Assumption in a Turnaround

Assuming that another crew already completed the lock-out or isolated the equipment before you arrived. This assumption has caused fatalities in shutdown environments. Verbal confirmation from a coworker is not isolation, it is an assumption passed from one person to another.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

High-pressure periods require higher attention, not lower standards. Everything that applies during normal operations applies during a shutdown, and several

things need to be applied even more carefully.

Know Your Permit and Actually Read It

Every task during a shutdown should have a current, signed, and complete work permit, and you should read it fully before starting. Do not sign off on a permit and assume the details match what you were verbally briefed on. If anything in the permit does not match the actual site conditions, the work scope, or what you were told at the start of your shift, stop and get it resolved before anyone begins work.

Brief Your Crew at the Start of Every Shift

Before anyone starts work, take five minutes to brief your crew on what is happening around them that day. Which crews are working in nearby areas, what hazards their work creates for your team, and what the emergency muster and response plan is for that day. Workers who understand the full picture of activity around them are far less likely to be caught off guard by something happening in an adjacent work zone.

Verify Isolation Yourself, Every Time

Do not rely on another crew's word that a lock-out is complete or that equipment has been isolated. Walk to the isolation point and verify it yourself before your team begins work. This takes less than a minute and it is non-negotiable. During shutdowns, when multiple crews are working on the same systems, the margin for a miscommunication or missed step is much higher than it is during normal operations.

Monitor Fatigue in Yourself and Your Crew

- If a coworker is making errors they would not normally make, seems confused, or is moving differently than usual, tell your supervisor
- If you personally are struggling to focus, reacting slowly, or feeling unusually irritable, report it before it becomes an incident
- Never let pressure to finish the job push a fatigued worker back onto the floor

Share Your Site Knowledge with Contractors

As a regular employee working alongside contractors or temporary workers, you know things about your site that they do not know and may not think to ask about. Where the emergency exits are. Which systems are actually live and which are isolated. What that noise means. Share that information. A contractor who has the right context is a safer contractor. Do not assume they know what is obvious to you.

FINAL WORD

A shutdown is not the time to lower your guard. It is the time to raise i.t. More workers, more tasks, and more pressure means more ways for things to go wrong.