



OCTOBER 2023

TOOLBOX TALKS

Worker safety: Working under pressure, Deadlines and time constraints

Time constraints are present in many jobs across a variety of industries. It is critical that workplaces prioritize worker safety when it comes to meeting deadlines. Time pressure can be caused by multiple factors, and it is important to explore solutions to factors influencing time pressures including challenges related to supply chain, acquiring specialized equipment, poor weather conditions, having enough skilled workers, and more.

A study exploring the impact of time pressure on construction worker performance found that “the majority of the respondents agreed that the schedule pressure does affect workers’ work behavior and performance” (Nepal et al., 2006). The “most significant negative effects of schedule pressure” according to participants was “the increase in the amount of out-of-sequence work and the number of work defects” (Nepal et al., 2006). Another finding from the study indicated that “under high-pressure conditions, workers tend to lose motivation to complete their work on time” (Nepal et al., 2006).

When workers perform tasks out of order, miss critical steps, or do not use the proper personal protective equipment



(PPE), there is a risk of human performance errors. These errors could result in worker injury, equipment damage, lost time from having to redo work, or

a combination of these consequences. For example, at the end of an extended day on-site performing routine wind turbine maintenance, the technicians began loading their truck with the equipment they used throughout the day. The workers were moving quickly through this task and failed to fully secure the back of the truck resulting in some equipment falling out once the vehicle began moving. The team parked the vehicle, re-loaded the truck, and securely fastened the door on the vehicle.

Open communication is important for understanding the factors that contribute to time pressure. Workplace Strategies for Mental Health (2023) has a resource for a team building activity called “mistake meetings.” Participants are asked to think of one mistake or challenge that they can share during the meeting and identify how they worked through the challenge or ask the group for input on how to solve it (Workplace Strategies for Mental Health, 2023). During one of these meetings, someone may share challenges regarding time pressure, which could start a conversation to identify and address root causes.

By creating a space where workers feel comfortable sharing their concerns regarding mistakes and challenges, everyone involved in a project can understand the perspectives of those in different roles within an organization. This creates the opportunity for holistic problem-solving and enhances future project planning activities.

From your experience, what factors have contributed to time pressure situations?

What mistakes or challenges have you faced at work from working under time pressure?

References

- Nepal, M. P., Park, M., and Son, B. (2006). Effects of schedule pressure on construction performance. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management*, 132(2), pp. 182-188. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/58422/1/58422.pdf>
- Workplace Strategies for Mental Health. (2023, July 17). *Team activity – Mistake meetings*. <https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/team-activity-mistake-meetings>

