



## HOW EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF IMPROVEMENT & STOP WORK ORDERS AFFECTS PROFITS AND REPUTATION



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# Effective Management of Improvement and Stop Work Orders

A Safety & Leadership Talk for Project Managers and Site Leaders

Delivered by: Owner / CEO / Senior Safety Leader

*Disclaimer: This talk is meant to educate and support leadership decision-making. Because occupational health and safety laws and enforcement practices vary across jurisdictions, always refer to your local legislation and regulator to confirm your specific legal obligations.*

**Opening (Set the tone)** “I want to talk about Improvement and Stop Work Orders — not because we’re in trouble, but because we run a professional company and we don’t leave risk to chance.”

Most companies only learn about Improvement or Stop Work Orders after they get one. We’re not going to be that company.

This conversation isn’t about fear. It’s about leadership, control, and protecting the business we’ve all helped build.

**The reality leaders need to understand** – An Improvement or Stop Work Order is not just a safety issue on a single site. It’s a **business event** with long-term consequences.

Across Canada, Improvement and Stop Work Orders are public. That means regulators publish them, and general contractors, owners, and insurers can look them up. If an order sticks, it becomes part of our permanent record. No explanation. No context. Just the fact that it happened.

That record affects how we’re seen when we bid work, when we get prequalified, and when something goes wrong later. Many companies never get told why they didn’t win the next job — they just quietly stop getting calls. This is one of the reasons why.

**What inspectors can — and cannot — do:** Inspectors have authority, but that authority only comes from one place: legislation. An Improvement or Stop Work Order can only be written for something that appears in the Act or the Regulations. Not preferences. Not guidance documents. Not opinions.

As a company, we have the right to ask — calmly and professionally — what legislative requirement an order is based on. That’s not arguing with an inspector. That’s due diligence. Strong companies know the rules they’re being held to.

**Why speed matters once an order is issued** - Once an Improvement or Stop Work Order is written, the clock starts immediately. In most jurisdictions, companies have about **14 days** to appeal. Miss that window and the order stands — even if it shouldn’t have been written in the first place.

If an order goes unchallenged, it becomes part of our enforcement history. That history follows us forward and works against us later. That’s why these situations need to be taken seriously and handled quickly.

**Why history makes things worse after an incident** - If there’s ever a serious incident in the future, investigators don’t just look at what happened that day. They look backward.

Previous Stop Work Orders suggest patterns. They suggest system failures. And they weaken any due diligence defence we might otherwise have. We don't get to erase our history. That's why preventing Improvement and Stop Work Orders matters as much as responding to them.

**One site can shut down all of them** - This is especially important our business. In many jurisdictions, if an inspector sees unsafe work at one site — for example, someone at a roof edge without fall protection — they can conclude it's a systemic issue. That can lead to Improvement or Stop Work Orders across **multiple sites**, not just the one they're standing on.

That means delays, contractual penalties, strained relationships with general contractors, and real financial damage. All from one breakdown in supervision or enforcement.

**This is why supervisors matter. This is why consistency matters.**

### **Let's talk about leadership in the field (Interactive)**

"I want to ask a few questions. There are no wrong answers — just honest ones."

- If a GC looked up our enforcement history today, would we be comfortable with what they see?
- If an inspector asked you to explain our fall protection standard right now, could you clearly explain it?
- Could you prove who was trained, when, and how?
- When was the last time you corrected unsafe work before someone else had to?
- Are we relying on workers to 'do the right thing,' or are we running a system that makes the right thing unavoidable?

The companies that get stopped are not only bad companies.

They're also good companies like ours where gaps in supervision and enforcement creep in.

**The leadership expectation** - "Safety isn't about catching people doing things wrong. It's about preventing situations where the wrong thing can happen." Our expectation is simple:

- Standards are clear.
- Training is real and provable.
- Supervisors enforce consistently — even when it's uncomfortable.
- Problems are corrected before inspectors or incidents expose them.

That's how we protect our people and our reputation.

**Close (Leadership message)** "Improvement and Stop Work Orders don't happen because people don't care. They happen when leadership systems fail under pressure." Our job is to make sure that never happens here.

Because what you don't know about Improvement and Stop Work Orders can cost us our people, our projects, and our reputation — and what we do know can save all three.

*(Refer to the Improvement and Stop Work Order Checklist on the next page.)*

# IMPROVEMENT & STOP WORK ORDER READINESS CHECKLIST

## Supervisor & PM Checklist

### A. Before work starts

- Critical high-risk tasks are clearly defined (especially work at heights)
- Written standards exist and are accessible in the field
- Workers are trained — with proof (dates, content, verification)
- Supervisors know the standard and are expected to enforce it

### B. During work

- Unsafe acts are corrected immediately — no exceptions
- Supervisors intervene before inspectors do
- Fall protection is enforced 100% of the time
- Shortcuts are not tolerated, even under schedule pressure

### C. If an inspector shows up

- Stay professional and cooperative
- Document observations, instructions, and discussions
- Ask for legislative references calmly if an order is issued
- Do not argue — do document

### D. If a Stop Work Order is issued

- Identify the exact Act or Regulation cited
- Track the appeal deadline (typically 14 days)
- Fix the root cause — not just the visible issue
- Assign corrective actions with clear accountability
- Close everything in writing

### E. Long-term leadership test

- Would our system stand up under investigation?
- Would a GC trust us after reviewing our record?
- Are supervisors truly accountable for safety outcomes?