

Rule, what rule?

The top 10 reasons for rule breaking



Rule breaking remains one of the most important challenges. 10 of the most common reasons for rule breaking for you to use in your next training session:

1. The top 10
2. Categories of violations
3. A training exercise to help get rule breaking into the open

Rule, what rule?

Thanks for your input.

We asked the question: What is the most common reason you have heard for rule breaking? We received over 100 responses and dozens of comments about rule breaking.

"I never knew that rule existed!"

So, using your valuable, firsthand experience, we have put together the following summary and training exercise.

Your top 10 rule breaking reasons

1. We grouped your reasons under the following 10 headings.
2. Where reasons were similar we used only one quote in a group.
3. The top 3 groups (1, 2 and 3) together represent about 50% of all the reasons put forward.

	Reason	Example (quotes)
1	Save time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time is money. • This will only take a second. • It would take me longer to follow the rule than to get the job done. • The job was only going to take 5 minutes so I didn't think we needed a <i>Confined Space Entry Permit</i>.
2	Didn't know the rule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I didn't know..... • That's not how we did it before. • This is the way I was taught. • I have not received any training on it yet. • There's so many rules I can't keep up with them. • Nobody told me. • I didn't know this was a rule.
3	It's the norm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everybody does it that way. • We have done this previously like this without any incident, nothing will happen this time as well. • Nobody has said anything before. • The guy in the control room, no I can't remember his name, said it was OK for me to do this.
4	Did not understand the rule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Didn't know that this is really what the rule meant. • I thought we didn't have to do this anymore.

5	Ease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is easier. • I know how to do the job without all that fuss. • Too much paper to do a short job.
6	Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How on earth will I achieve those stretch targets without shortcuts? • I think 'B' shift might do it that way but we have found this way is much better.
7	Did not understand the reasons for the rule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's no big deal. • There's no reason to.....(more implied than expressed and usually with a shoulder shrug). • I do this all the time and nothing ever happens. • It's common sense so why do we need rules? • That's how we always did it before and no one ever got hurt. • I was doing it as safely as I could.
8	Too restrictive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do not have the time to complete all of the paperwork; we must start up. • You will not say to me how to do my job. • All this time, I have been working this way without any problems before the rule was introduced, why do you think I need your rules now?
9	Too impractical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's quite impractical...whoever wrote that rule has obviously never actually done that task. • That control process is a bunch of complications. • It's a stupid rule. • The rules conflict with each other so I have to break one to follow another.
10	Under pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was running out of time. • I was late. • I was under pressure to get the job done. • The whole process takes a long time, so in by-passing procedures we are reducing downtime. • Sorry, too caught up and forgot.

Categories of violations

Rule breaking is divided into 3 types:

1. It's just Routine

When breaking a rule has become commonplace or simply the way a job gets done, then this is a **Routine violation**.

2. The Situation triggered it

This occurs when the situation is such that it was perceived as the only option. Examples include lack of the correct equipment, workload pressure or the work environment.

3. Exceptional circumstances

There are times when employees feel they must break the rules even though they know the risk is great.

Routine wins out

Looking through the 100 rule breaking reasons, nearly all of them fall into 'Routine'.

To quote the classic safety culture description:

“It’s just the way we do things around here”.

According to some industry statistics, Routine violations are representative in about 80% of accidents.

Use this information in your next safety talk

Violations need to be managed and, one of the first things to do is to talk openly about violations, not to sweep them under the carpet.

There is a need to have discussions to explore reasons for violations. For example, 'saving time' sounds like the reason, but it must beg the follow up question:

Why do you feel you need to save time?

At your next safety talk:

1. Select one of the groups (1 to 10 in the table) to discuss with your team.
2. Read out the typical quotes from each group.
3. Ask your team:
 - ⇒ What do you think about these quotes?
 - ⇒ Can you think of a time and rule when that reason might be applied, whether from a previous experience or something you witness happening now.
 - ⇒ What can you do to remove the reason, in other words, remove the need to violate that rule?