

# Emergency Triage Flowchart

*Three questions. Run within five minutes of any out-of-schedule request. If all three answers are "no," the request is not an emergency.*

**Companion to:** *Fix the System*, Chapter 10. **Who uses it:** the shift supervisor. Every shift, every request. **Where posted:** at every supervisor station, at the maintenance shop entry, and on every crew lead's clipboard.

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## THE REQUEST ARRIVES

Every request for work to be started outside the planned/scheduled cycle goes through this flowchart first. Includes requests from operators, engineers, managers, vendors, and anyone else who asks for immediate maintenance action.

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## QUESTION 1 — SAFETY

**Is there imminent risk of injury, environmental release, or regulatory violation if the work is not performed within hours?**

- **YES -> EMERGENCY.** Route to immediate response. Maintenance supervisor authorizes crew dispatch. Plant manager notified within the shift.
- **NO -> continue to Question 2.**

**Imminent means minutes to hours, not days.** A fume hood that needs rebalancing is not Question-1-yes. A leaking chlorine line is.

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## QUESTION 2 — CATASTROPHIC FAILURE

**Has an asset failed catastrophically, or is it actively failing, with significant risk to production, capital, or downstream systems?**

- **YES -> EMERGENCY.** Route to immediate response. Plant manager notified.
- **NO -> continue to Question 3.**

**"Catastrophic" means failure that produces cascading consequences** — extended line-down (days, not hours), capital-level equipment damage, or downstream process disruption. Worn components are not catastrophic. A shattered shaft or seized bearing at 3 a.m. is.

**"Actively failing" means the asset is currently degrading and further runtime makes the failure worse.** A bearing with rising temperature and vibration over the last 30 minutes is active. A bearing that "might fail next week" is not.

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## QUESTION 3 — REGULATORY DEADLINE

Is there a regulatory compliance deadline within the next 48-72 hours that cannot otherwise be met?

- **YES -> EMERGENCY.** Route to immediate response. Plant manager and EHS notified.
- **NO -> continue below.**

**"Regulatory" means externally enforced** — EPA, OSHA, state, municipal inspection, permit renewal. Not internal audit. Not customer-driven deadline.

**"Cannot otherwise be met" means the deadline would be missed if this were routed to normal planning.** If next week's scheduling meeting can still get it done in time, it's not an emergency.

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## IF ALL THREE ANSWERS ARE "NO"

**THIS IS NOT AN EMERGENCY.**

Route the request to one of two paths:

**Path A — Break-in absorbed by reserve.** If the 15-20% reserved capacity can absorb the request without displacing committed work, approve it as a within-week break-in. No displacement, no escalation. Supervisor approves.

**Path B — Planning queue.** If reserve cannot absorb it, the request goes to the next planning/scheduling meeting. Respond to the requester: *"This doesn't meet the emergency criteria. It will be reviewed at the Monday scheduling meeting and scheduled for next week."*

Do NOT route to "just squeeze it in." That is the path that destroys the cycle.

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## AFTER AN EMERGENCY IS DECLARED

1. **Maintenance supervisor dispatches the crew.** 2. **Plant manager notified within the shift** (or next morning if it's a middle-of-night call and the situation is contained). 3. **Displaced work is formally rescheduled** with written notice to operations via the frozen-zone escalation log. 4. **Within 48 hours: post-emergency debrief.** 15 minutes, 4 questions, one or two improvements into the planning queue. 5. **Log the emergency** in the monthly emergency tally. Target: 2-4 real emergencies per month for a typical mid-size plant.

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## THE FIVE FALSE-URGENCY PATTERNS

If a request answers "no" to all three questions but the requester insists it's urgent, it is almost certainly one of these five patterns. Respectfully name the pattern to the requester:

1. **"I need this by Friday."** Self-imposed deadline. -> Planning queue.
2. **"This is going to break soon."** That's a Chapter 5 notification. -> Planning queue (unless Q2 applies).
3. **Supervisor-to-supervisor direct ask.** Bypasses the triage.

-> Back through supervisor, then through the flowchart. 4. **Operator's favorite technician.** Bypasses the CMMS. -> Log it as a notification; route to the flowchart. 5. **Executive-attention request.** Political urgency. -> Plant manager decides whether to escalate; otherwise planning queue.

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## TRACKING

The supervisor on each shift logs every request that went through the flowchart. Weekly review:

| Date | Shift | Requestor | Request | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Decision | Outcome |
|------|-------|-----------|---------|----|----|----|----------|---------|
|      |       |           |         |    |    |    |          |         |
|      |       |           |         |    |    |    |          |         |

Monthly targets:

- **Total emergencies (all three questions used):** 2-4 per month
  - **Break-ins absorbed by reserve:** 15-25 per month (varies with plant size)
  - **Requests routed to planning queue:** highest volume, and should be trending UP for the first quarter of the installation as the plant learns to self-filter
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*From Fix the System by Ivan Getov. Companion to Chapter 10: Emergencies and Break-In. [getov.xyz/toolkit/fix-the-system/ch10/emergency-triage-flowchart](http://getov.xyz/toolkit/fix-the-system/ch10/emergency-triage-flowchart). Free. No email required.*