

The False Urgency Test

Five patterns of not-actually-an-emergency. If a request matches one of these, it is false urgency. Route it to the planning queue with an explanation.

Companion to: *Fix the System*, Chapter 10. **Used alongside:** the *Emergency Triage Flowchart*. **Purpose:** teach the shift supervisors to recognize false urgency fast, name it respectfully to the requester, and route it without drama.

Pattern 1 — THE SELF-IMPOSED FRIDAY DEADLINE

What it looks like: "I need this by Friday."

Why it's false urgency: Friday is a preference, not an emergency. The only Fridays that qualify as emergencies are Friday regulatory deadlines (Question 3 of the triage flowchart). Everything else — production goals, customer promises, internal reporting cycles — is planning, not emergency.

How to respond: *"This doesn't meet the emergency criteria. If Friday is a hard deadline for business reasons, let's get it into next week's planning queue and work on timing. If it's a preference, it goes into the standard two-week horizon."*

When it's actually real: if the "Friday" is a regulatory inspection (Q3 = yes), it IS an emergency.

Pattern 2 — THE "GOING TO BREAK SOON" ANTICIPATION

What it looks like: "This bearing is going to fail soon, we should do it now."

Why it's false urgency: "Going to break soon" is not a failure. It is an observation. Observations belong in the notification channel (Chapter 5), which routes them to the planning queue for proper planning and scheduling. Moving them to the emergency channel converts planning work into unplanned work and loses the one-third labor-hour efficiency.

How to respond: *"This is a notification, not an emergency. Let's write it up in the CMMS and get it into the planning queue. If it's showing active degradation (rising temperature, rising vibration, growing leak) in the next 24 hours, that's Question 2 and we escalate. Otherwise it gets planned."*

When it's actually real: if the asset is actively degrading (Q2 = yes — "actively failing"), it IS an emergency. The trick is distinguishing "going to fail someday" from "is failing right now."

Pattern 3 — THE SUPERVISOR-TO-SUPERVISOR DIRECT ASK

What it looks like: An operations supervisor walks into the maintenance shop and asks Eddie directly to handle something. Eddie, wanting to help, says yes. Eddie is now the escalation channel.

Why it's false urgency: Most supervisor-to-supervisor asks are not emergencies. They bypass the flowchart entirely because they never get triaged. The work gets done but the cycle costs accumulate silently.

How to respond (for Eddie): *"I can take a look, but let me run it through the supervisor triage first — it'll take two minutes. If it's an emergency it gets the crew right now. If it's not, it goes to the planning queue and we'll schedule it properly."*

Coaching note for the maintenance manager: this is the hardest pattern to install against because crew leads want to be helpful. The fix is not to tell Eddie "no." The fix is to give Eddie the script above so his "yes" becomes "yes, after the two-minute triage."

Pattern 4 — THE OPERATOR'S FAVORITE TECHNICIAN

What it looks like: An operator reports an issue directly to a technician they trust (Mike from Chapter 5). The technician handles it on the spot. It never touches the CMMS.

Why it's false urgency: It bypasses identification (Chapter 5), planning (Chapter 6), scheduling (Chapter 7), and the triage flowchart. The work gets done but produces no close-out data, no failure-code record, and no feedback into the cycle. Hundreds of these per year at a typical plant.

How to respond: The fix is structural, not conversational. It comes from Chapter 5's identification installation: operators writing notifications (not reporting verbally to their favorite technician), and technicians refusing to handle undocumented work. The technician's response to a verbal walkup should be: *"Got it — let me get you the notification form. Takes 90 seconds."*

Pattern 5 — THE EXECUTIVE-ATTENTION REQUEST

What it looks like: Something becomes "urgent" because a senior leader has noticed it and asked about it. A VP toured the plant and saw a leak. The plant manager asked about a noise on Line 5.

Why it's false urgency: The urgency is political, not operational. The underlying issue may be real (or may not), but the emergency designation is being driven by attention, not by the three triage criteria.

How to respond: This pattern requires the plant manager to hold the line, because pushback is above the maintenance manager's pay grade. The script the maintenance manager uses with the plant manager: *"The VP's observation is a real issue. Let me run it through our standard triage. If it meets the three criteria, it becomes an emergency — you'll have an update within the hour. If it doesn't, it gets into the planning queue and we'll schedule it properly. We'll have it handled either way, and I can give you status when the VP asks."*

The goal is not to ignore the VP. The goal is to handle the VP's observation through the same system that handles every other request, so the system stays installed.

THE SHORT VERSION — what the supervisor says out loud

When a false-urgency request arrives, the supervisor's response template is:

"Let me run this through the triage. [Runs the three questions in 2 minutes.] This doesn't meet the emergency criteria. It'll go into [reserve / planning queue] and be [scheduled this week / scheduled next week]. Here's what I need from you: [brief description of how the requester will know when it's done]."

Short. Respectful. Structural. Does not argue. Does not apologize.

TRACKING — Pattern frequency

Over the first 90 days of the installation, track which patterns show up most:

Pattern	Week 1-4 count	Week 5-8 count	Week 9-12 count
1. Self-imposed Friday			
2. "Going to break soon"			
3. Supervisor direct ask			
4. Operator's favorite tech			
5. Executive attention			

Expect all five patterns to drop across the quarter. Pattern 3 drops fastest (Eddie learns the script). Pattern 5 drops slowest (requires plant-manager discipline).

From Fix the System by Ivan Getov. Companion to Chapter 10: Emergencies and Break-In. getov.xyz/toolkit/fix-the-system/ch10/false-urgency-test. Free. No email required.