

Escalation Protocol Builder

Build a shared language for raising a hand early and knowing what happens next. Adapt the book’s five-level model to your organization: define observable signals, assign ownership by role, and make every handoff explicit.

Define the handoff points

Use observable signals. Assign an accountable role. Notification comes first.

LEVEL	STARTING-POINT EXAMPLES	YOUR TRIGGER EXAMPLES	ACCOUNTABLE ROLE
01 Normal Day to day operational issues	Common disruption; minor accidents with no injuries; equipment failures with no productivity or critical process impact. Owned by local leadership and front line supervision.		
HANDOFF DECISION What makes “Normal” different from “something happening”? And what should local management handle that they might otherwise escalate?			
02 Limited Scope and impact	Disruption with routine customer impact; incidents below but approaching regulatory reportable limits. Still owned locally. A regional call and a monitoring function get stood up.		
HANDOFF DECISION Where does ownership actually hand off? This is the second of the two points where escalation most often fails.			
03 Large Scope and impact	Disruption at critical customers; any injury; regulatory reportable issues; inspections; environmental risks. Senior regional management or VP owns it. Core crisis team on notice.		
04 Expanding Serious event	Major disruption; multiple injuries; prosecution for regulatory violations; widespread disaster; hostile media attention; law enforcement response. An event owner is assigned.		
05 Severe Significant implications for the organization	Fatality; public health impact; major environmental impact; long term service disruption; material threat to survivability. Executive leadership team or CEO. Notify CEO or board.		

Before you circulate it

- ☐ **One page.**
Not a detailed procedure. A simple aide to memory.
- ☐ **Not prescriptive.**
Driven by examples, not “when threshold X is reached, initiate SOP 123.”
- ☐ **Owner by role, not name.**
At each level, agreed on a blue-sky day. A regional matter does not need a CEO.
- ☐ **Notification is always first.**
At every level, before anything else.
- ☐ **It goes both ways.**
Up as things worsen, down when they do not, with no penalty for raising the level.
- ☐ **A living document.**
It changes through real experience and carries the voice of the people who use it.

Failure mode

Watch for drift toward the old Homeland Security threat levels. They lacked specificity, reinforced ambiguity, and seemed arbitrary to the people using them.

The first escalation level is the most important.

Catastrophe announces itself. What gets missed is the quiet deviation from normal, expanding unnoticed until the stakes are higher than they had to be.

Before deployment

Before you deploy this, exercise it with the operations leads, workers, and supervisors who will use it, not to test them but to bend and break it into something that works on the front line.