

Achieving Situation Awareness in Five Minutes

The Rule of Three

What is it?

This tool is a simple technique that can help you develop a good habit for realising how normal situations can escalate to become serious risks and how this can be prevented. In five minutes, you have a process for defining your problem areas and guidelines for maintaining control.

Why use it?

Real life decision-making is often made hard because of many uncertainties. How do you know when to stop and when to go on? You can set hard limits, but these are often arbitrary or intended to compensate for all the other things that might go wrong, but don't usually. When you are involved in critical operations, personal, operational or even commercial decisions, you need to know how many problems areas you are facing, how serious they are, and what you can control.



The idea is simple. We have clear No-Go limits – **Reds** and marginal conditions – **Ambers**. If there are no problems we are in the clear – **Green**. We must always stop if we have a Red, but too many ambers are just as risky. The rule says, Three Ambers = Red. When we have too many ambers, we can try to manage some of them back into the green, maintaining control of what might become an escalating situation. Analyses of many incidents has shown a relationship between the number of ambers you have and whether the outcome is a near miss or an accident.

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