



CONSTRUCTION

How to Beat the Biggest Job-Site Productivity Busters

From misplaced materials and trade stacking to labor challenges and poor planning, everyday job-site time wasters can quickly eat into project schedules and margins.

Tim Kridel Sept. 15, 2026

Key Takeaways

- A significant portion of electricians are nearing retirement, leading to a loss of valuable experience and increased project management challenges.
- Workforce development plans, including mentorship and training, are essential to transfer knowledge and improve site efficiency.
- Common time wasters include material handling, rework, poor planning, and communication gaps, all of which can be mitigated with better processes.
- Early site planning and staging of materials prevent delays caused by unorganized logistics and material mismanagement.
- Safety protocols like lockout/tagout and hazard analysis are crucial for maintaining productivity and preventing costly incidents.

Roughly 20% of electricians are 55 or older, [according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics \(BLS\)](#). Their retirements over the next several years are a major reason for the 81,000 annual job openings that [the BLS forecasts](#) through 2034. But the profession isn't losing just workers. It's also losing experience — the hard-won kind that knows how to avoid wasting time on job sites.

"You've got less experienced workers trying to do what the lead foreman or the experienced worker used to do," says Greg Shannon, [Henderson Building Solutions](#) director of project management. "That wastes time because then as a project manager, construction manager, or project executive, you've got more supervision time: 'You don't understand what you gotta do here, so let me walk you through this.' And it affects not only that project because if you're managing multiple projects, you have only so many hours in a day."

Hence the importance of workforce-development plans that create ample opportunities for veterans to share their decades of tips and best practices before they retire.

"As experienced workers retire or move into different roles, the industry has to transfer knowledge more effectively while still keeping projects moving," says Natalie Eide, Wesco vice president of construction – Southeast. "Mentorship, apprenticeship pathways, and better project-management training can help, but contractors also need processes and tools that make the best use of the skilled workers they have today."

A workforce-development plan can leverage that experience to identify the top job-site time wasters and then the policies and processes for mitigating them.

"Waste is whatever labor does other than final installation," says Dr. Perry Daneshgari, president and CEO of [MCA, Inc.](#) "[Examples include] material handling, chasing information, rework, travel and movement, congestion, waiting on other trades, inspection-before-inspection, wrong installation, poor sequencing, and field improvisation caused by incomplete planning."

For more on Dr. Perry Daneshgari's biggest job-site time wasters and how to minimize them, see the **Sidebar**, "Top Time Wasters at a Glance," below.

Maximizing job-site productivity and efficiency isn't a new priority, of course. But it's more important than ever with megaprojects, such as hyperscale data centers, that can tie up employees on a single site for years.

"Customers are asking contractors to complete larger, more complex projects on shorter timelines," Eide says. "It is no longer just about protecting margin on a single job. It is about protecting capacity across the business. When crews lose time on one project, that can affect the contractor's ability to take on the next project, meet customer expectations, or deploy scarce labor where it is needed most."



Poorly organized materials and cluttered job sites can force electricians to spend valuable time searching for supplies and moving materials instead of performing installation work.

Plan ahead

Planning is key for ensuring that journeymen and master electricians can show up at the job site every day and get straight to work instead of spending the first hour rounding up everything they need.

"One of the biggest time wasters on any job site is failing to use skilled labor where it creates the most value," Eide says. "When licensed electricians are spending time unpacking materials, sorting boxes, tracking down missing products, or performing basic assembly, that is time not being spent on the work only they are trained and qualified to do."

Ideally, planning should begin long before electricians show up at a new job site.

"It's almost comical in the industry how often a field team's first interaction with the site is the first day they mobilize," says [Tyler Paré](#), who leads [FMI's](#)

Performance practice. "'Here's the address of where you're going Monday. When you get there Monday, you can start to figure it out.'"

For example, foremen and other supervisors should scope out the project far enough in advance to ensure that everything from materials and tools to dumpsters and telehandlers will be staged where electricians will need them. That could take weeks to plan and execute.

"We're big proponents for forcing that job-site visit to happen well before mobilization, where a field leader can really start to conceptualize what they're up against in terms of the spatial layout," Paré says. "They can really start to think about their site logistics and their layout and how they're going to approach it."

The bigger the project — such as a hyperscale data center or high-rise — the earlier planning should start.

"The connection between the field and the back office is an area that does not always get enough attention," Eide says. "Inventory management, order tracking, project planning, documentation, and vendor coordination all have a direct impact on job-site productivity. If those processes are handled manually — or if information is spread across too many systems and stakeholders — delays can quickly show up in the field. A crew may be ready to work, but the materials, approvals, or information they need may not be ready with them."

It's obviously important to have materials and equipment on site when they're needed. It's less obvious but equally important that they shouldn't show up so far in advance that they wind up staged and forgotten in some remote, inconvenient corner.

"Field material management is a huge time waster," Paré says. "Vendors show up on site with a truckload of light fixtures or whatever. Who's receiving that? Where are we storing it? Do we know where it is? Oftentimes, that's grossly mismanaged and leads to theft, loss, damage of material, and a bunch of wasted time going back and forth across the site looking for that stuff. How far the material is from the point of install is a huge one. An enormous amount of labor

is wasted just going back and forth to get more material to keep the crew flowing and installing."

Communication with GCs, other trades

Timely, accurate information can be as important as materials for maximizing productivity.

"We have three things that we have to make sure the field has: information, material, and tools," says Dave Aguirre, Tri-City Electric director of construction services. "If one of those is missing, then your productivity is shot. If the information is missing, it's gonna get worse because you might be redoing it."

Eide agrees: "Rework is another significant time waster. When teams are working from outdated information, incomplete drawings, late changes, or unclear scopes, productivity suffers. The work may still get done, but it takes longer, costs more, and puts additional pressure on already constrained labor resources. In many cases, the issue is not the capability of the field team; it is the lack of alignment, visibility or preparation around them."

Sharing information with general contractors and other trades helps avoid time wasters such as trade stacking.

"We have daily sub meetings," says Henderson's Shannon. "Even if it's just a 10- or 15-minute meeting: 'What's going on today? Here's what I need.' The plumber may say, 'I'm shutting down this water line,' so I'm going to make sure all power is not here. Or the electrician says, 'I got these panels locked out, so don't anybody go in there and try to mess with the padlocks on them.'"

That's also an example of how some types of communication needs to be in writing.

"We have a pretty adept lockout/tagout procedure," Aguirre says. "Anytime you fill it out, you're the only one that's going to have a key to it. Your information's going to be on there. They will be able to get ahold of you."

A safe job site is a productive job site

LOTO also highlights how safety affects productivity.

"Oftentimes, we hear that all of these safety requirements and rules and regulations are slowing us down," Paré says. "My argument to that is a safe job site is a productive job site."

Even when it's not fatal, an incident can shut down a job site for a day or more.

"People don't realize how a safety incident affects the project, the schedule, and even the morale on the job site," Shannon says. "I think safety is one of those [time wasters] that is underestimated: 'When something happens, okay, well, we'll shut down for a day, but we'll be right back the day after that.' And that's just not the way it works."

Safety also ties in with pre-planning to ensure that everything is in the right place at the right time, including empty boxes in dumpsters and safe temporary power for other trades.

"You can pretty much tell when you walk on a job site which ones are safe and which ones are not," Paré says. "There's a general tightness and cleanliness to a safe job site where there's not trash and cords and obstacles and hazards lying around because someone's monitoring that and maintaining a safe and clean job site. All those things relate to productivity, as well."

That's why FMI spends five minutes every morning doing a job hazard analysis.

"People will say we're burning productive time doing this job hazard analysis," Paré says. "The five minutes you invest in thinking about the safety parameters of the day are going to pay back tenfold in maintaining a job site where people aren't going to be injured. An injury kills productivity for the entire day or week and then sucks the morale out of the job site."

Prefab off site and on site

Prefab is another approach to avoid wasting time.

"Prefabrication, to me, that's like an efficiency gain versus avoidance of a time waster, but they could be two sides of the same coin," Paré says.

"Prefabrication is a whole spectrum — from kitting all the way up to full modular. I do think we see more and more on-site prefabrication where we're staging certain areas to bend pipe and conduit and do assemblies in a controlled space on the job site before moving it to the point of install."

Prefab can be done off site, but sometimes it makes more sense to do it on site.

"A big part of trying to solve prefab for the industry has been: 'How do I balance the workflow in a manufacturing facility? I've got to continuously have enough backlog, the right kind of backlog, the right workers to drive a factory environment,'" Paré says. "[Instead], we're setting up an area on the job site or adjacent where we're going to do a lot of repetitive tasks very efficiently and not force someone to try to do that in confined space on the eighth floor."

The home stretch is a time when productivity can plummet. Planning helps here, too.

"Closeout is a big one," Paré says. "This is symptomatic of usually larger projects. Let's say it's a 12- to 18-month project. We've had all kinds of ups and downs, and we just want the job to be over. Without a real crisp and clear plan for executing the final 20%, there's a huge opportunity for the job just to sort of slide along and never cross the finish line. This is a killer on schedule. Productivity goes off a cliff. There's usually a lot of punchlist stuff. By that time, they've probably demobilized some of the crew, some of the management, and some of the equipment. All that has an impact on the margins and client satisfaction."

Top Time Waters at a Glance

What's eating away at labor productivity on today's job sites? According to Dr. Perry Daneshgari, president and CEO of [MCA, Inc.](#), a Grand Blanc, Mich.-based construction consulting firm specializing in productivity and process improvement, here's a quick look at the biggest time wasters, how contractors can minimize them, and why improving productivity is becoming more critical.

Top time wasters:

- Material handling.
- Chasing information.
- Rework.
- Travel and movement.
- Congestion.
- Waiting on other trades.
- Inspection-before-inspection.
- Wrong installation.
- Poor sequencing.
- Field improvisation caused by incomplete planning.

Basically, he says waste is whatever labor does other than final installation.

How to minimize job-site productivity busters:

- Make waste visible.
- Plan from a field-based WBS.
- Use short-interval schedules.
- Externalize repetitive work through prefab and agile procurement.
- Measure obstacles daily.
- Create fast feedback loops.

According to Dr. Daneshgari, if it is not measured, it is not managed.

Other pressures on productivity:

- Electrification.
- Grid modernization.
- Schedule compression.
- Complex systems.
- Supply-chain risk.
- Aging workforce.
- Larger project scale.
- Rising customer expectations.

He says productivity is no longer a competitive advantage; it's an industry requirement.

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Kridel is an independent analyst and freelance writer with experience in covering technology, telecommunications, and more. He can be...