By-the-Book vs In-the-Field: Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Practice Picture This



This image shows the maintenance floor of a paper mill during a production shift. Three workers are gathered around a large sheeter machine where a conveyor belt has stopped mid-operation. The machine is still energized — no lockout devices are visible on any of the control points, and the red lockout station mounted on the wall nearby has not been accessed. One worker is already reaching into the conveyor system with a tool, beginning to replace the motor while the surrounding equipment remains live. A laminated lockout/tagout procedure card is posted directly on the machine, clearly visible — but no one has referenced it. A supervisor stands a few feet away, watching the work proceed without intervening.

The written procedure in this image is inches away from the workers who needed it. The lockout station is on the wall behind

them. Every requirement needed to keep these workers safe was present in this room — posted, labeled, and accessible. What was missing was the gap between what the policy said and what happened in the field at the moment the job began. A procedure that is written but not followed provides the same protection as one that was never written at all. Lockout/tagout is not a formality to complete before the real work starts — it is the work. Every energy source must be isolated and verified before any maintenance begins, every time, regardless of how routine the task appears.