

Emergency Hotfix Procedure

INTERNAL — Helix Engineering / CS Operations

WHEN A HOTFIX IS APPROPRIATE

When a fix is faster than a rollback (e.g., one-line bug fix), or when a rollback isn't possible (incompatible migration, data correction needed). Otherwise prefer rollback.

AUTHORIZATION

Hotfixes bypass normal review. Authorization required from: (1) On-call engineer, (2) Engineering manager or director on call. Two-person rule applies — never deploy a hotfix solo.

PROCEDURE

(1) Branch from the current production tag. (2) Make the minimum change needed. (3) Get the second person to review. Even a quick eyeball review catches typos. (4) Run the hotfix CI pipeline. (5) Deploy to production.

TESTING

Hotfixes skip integration tests but must pass unit tests. If unit tests are failing, do not deploy — roll back instead.

MONITORING

Watch error rates closely after deploy. If errors increase, roll back the hotfix immediately.

FOLLOW-UP

Within 24 hours: (1) Cherry-pick the hotfix into main. (2) Add a regression test. (3) Schedule a postmortem.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Do not include unrelated changes in a hotfix branch. Do not skip the second-person review. Do not deploy a hotfix outside of normal business hours unless required by an active incident.