Use Your Head, Wear Your Hard Hat Meeting Kit

WHAT’S AT STAKE

The head is the most important part of the body and should be protected from injuries. Wearing a hard hat is the first line of defense for the head. It protects us from potential brain damage or other head injury that results from the impact of a falling or flying object. It also protects the head from electrical shock and burns.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

GUARD YOUR HEAD AGAINST WORKPLACE HAZARD

Every worker must wear head protection if at risk of these common hazards:

1. Being struck by falling objects.
2. Bumping their heads on fixed objects.
3. Coming into contact with electrical hazards.

EFFECTS OF A HEAD INJURY

Head injuries can result in long-term damage and death, with injuries often including memory loss, fractured bones, and spine damage – some of which cannot be cured.

When you sustain a traumatic head injury, you can often experience loss of consciousness, fatigue, memory loss, cognitive impairments, decreased concentration, headaches, and other neurological deficits. These workplace injuries are also known as closed-head injuries and are serious.

Unfortunately, injured workers with traumatic brain injuries, or closed-head injuries, have difficulty in the initial diagnosis phase. As a result, these invisible injuries result in injured workers enduring multiple diagnostic examinations and physician visits just to get a viable treatment plan or working prognosis.

More severe brain injuries can result in comas, concussions, and even death. The treatment for head and brain injuries can be extensive and require assisted living arrangements, a battery of diagnostic testing, a host of neurological specialists, experimental testing, and serious medication.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

WHAT WORKERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HARD HATS

The suspension system—the adjustable, inner portion of a hard hat—serves as a shock absorber. It withstands the impact from a strike to the head and spreads it out evenly over a larger area. Even if the hard hat dents or shatters as the result of an impact, it can still take some force out of the strike to the head. Just as important as having a hard hat when required is making sure it's in good condition and fits properly.

If the hard hat ever takes any type of hard impact—even if it remains intact—it should be replaced because the suspension mechanism has been compromised. Hard hats stored in extreme heat or direct sunlight may wear out sooner or damage more quickly.

HOW WORKERS NEED TO USE A HARD HAT SAFELY

Only wear approved hard hats manufactured to meet required industry standards. For maximum protection, choose the hard hat most suitable for the work being performed. A hard hat that fits correctly will be the most comfortable and provide the best protection. A correct fit provides sufficient room between the suspension system and the hat's shell for better ventilation and to better withstand any impact.

When inspecting a hard hat, looking for damage is a good place to start. A quick test is to squeeze the sides of the hat and feel for any signs of damage. Does it make a snap or pop sound that would indicate part of it may be broken? Are there dents in the hat, cracks, gouges, frays, and breaks in the straps or suspension? If yes, the hard hat needs to be replaced.

Hard hats will need to be replaced if the answer to any of these next three questions is yes:

- Is the hard hat more than four years old?
- Is the hard hat fading, chalky, or brittle?
- Has the hard hat suffered an impact?

Most manufacturers specify cleaning the hard hat with mild soap and warm water and letting it air dry. Never use solvents or any type of harsh chemicals to clean the hard hats because they can damage the plastic shell.

FOR HARD HATS TO BE EFFECTIVE, WORKERS SHOULD CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING

- **Fit**. For maximum protection, a hard hat should fit securely on the head and the suspension should be snug.
- **Inspection.** Users should inspect their hard hat shells and suspension frequently. The suspension should be replaced annually and the shell every two to five years, depending on usage. (Be sure to follow directions from the manufacturer.)
- **Disposal.** If a hard hat has sustained impact, it may need be disposed of even if damage is not immediately visible.
- **Extra objects.** Items should never be placed between the suspension and the shell.
- **Storage.** Avoid leaving hard hats in direct sunlight or extreme temperatures for extended periods of time as this will degrade most plastic shells.
- **Cleaning.** Certain chemicals, solvents or gasoline can also weaken shells, which is why it's important to wash hard hats with soap and water.
- **Alteration.** Workers should never puncture, modify, or engrave the shell or

suspension of a hard hat.
- **Maintenance**. Even well-maintained head protection must be replaced every 5 years. If worn every day, however, replace your hat every two years and the suspension yearly.

Tips To Keep A Hard Hat In Optimum Shape.

1. Regularly inspect hard hats for any damage and replace them as often as necessary. Check for cracks and holes daily, and remember that paints, cleaning agents, and UV light can weaken the surface of the hat.
2. Clean hard hats daily. Doing so can extend its useful life.
3. Check the suspension system regularly for wear and tear.
4. Store hard hats in a shaded, well-ventilated area. Sunlight and extreme heat can damage caps over time.
5. Do not apply labels or stickers since they may hide cracks or other damage.
6. Do not create holes into a hard hat since doing so may damage its ability to protect.

FINAL WORD

A single head injury can be fatal or affect a person significantly for life. Therefore, don’t make the mistake of not wearing head protection while on the job.