

THE IMPORTANCE OF HARD HATS



By Rich Howell,
Basic Resources Inc.

Reasons for Wearing a Hard Hat

- 1) Hard hats protect the head of our most valuable assets.
- 2) Hard hats protect the employees if they bump their heads against fixed objects and equipment.
- 3) Hard hats will protect employees if heavy equipment bumps into them.
- 4) Hard hats protect employees from falling objects.
- 5) A properly worn hard hat will protect the employees head in case of a fall.
- 6) If a powered industrial truck rolls over, an employee with a hard hat on has a better chance of survival.
- 7) Employees are working in and around traffic, which is unpredictable.
- 8) Hard hats make employees more visible at day and night.
- 9) A properly worn hard hat gives employees more ventilation than a baseball cap and a hard hat's reflective property makes it cooler than wearing a baseball cap.
- 10) Wide brim hard hats provide more sun protection for employees.
- 11) More and more clients/projects are requiring contractors to wear hard hats on their jobs.
- 12) The difference in the image that is portrayed between a work crew wearing hard hats and a crew that is not is huge.

Under Cal/OSHA Title 8, Section 3381, hard hats are a requirement; "Employees working in locations where there is a risk of receiving head injuries from flying or falling objects and/or electric shock and burns shall wear approved head protection".

In general, protective helmets or hard hats should do the following:

- Resist penetration by objects.
- Absorb the shock of a blow.
- Be water-resistant and slow burning.
- Have clear instructions explaining proper adjustment and replacement of the suspension and headband.

Hard hats must have a hard outer shell and a shock-absorbing lining that incorporates a headband and straps that suspend the shell from 1 to 1 1/4 inches (2.54 cm to 3.18 cm) away from the head. This type of design provides shock absorption during an impact and ventilation during normal wear. Protective headgear must meet ANSI Standard Z89.1-1986 (Protective Headgear for Industrial Workers) or provide an equivalent level

Continued

protect employees properly, **unless you have a written exception from the manufacturer.** If you have the manufacturer's written approval and choose to wear your hard hat backwards, the webbing must be turned around so the ratchet is always at the back of the hard hat.

Types of Hard Hats

Hard hats are divided into three industrial classes:

- **Class A hard hats** provide impact and penetration resistance along with limited voltage protection (up to 2,200 volts).
- **Class B hard hats** provide the highest level of protection against electrical hazards, with high-voltage shock and burn protection (up to 20,000 volts). They also provide protection from impact and penetration hazards by flying/falling objects.
- **Class C hard hats** provide lightweight comfort and impact protection but offer no protection from electrical hazards.

The main styles are: ball cap, V-guard, wide brim, and full brim. It is essential to check the type of hard hat employees are using to ensure that the equipment provides appropriate protection. Each hat should bear a label inside the shell that lists the manufacturer, the ANSI designation and the class of the hat.

Size and Care Considerations

Head protection that is either too large or too small is inappropriate for use, even if it meets all other requirements. A proper fit should allow sufficient clearance between the shell and the suspension system for ventilation and distribution of an impact. The hat should not bind, slip, fall off or irritate the skin. Some protective headgear allows for the use of various accessories to help employees deal with changing environmental conditions, such as slots for earmuffs, safety glasses, face shields and mounted lights. Optional brims may provide additional protection from the sun and some hats have channels that guide rainwater away from the face. Protective headgear accessories must not compromise the safety elements of the equipment.

Periodic cleaning and inspection will extend the useful life of protective headgear. A daily inspection of the hard hat shell, suspension system and other accessories for holes, cracks, tears or other damage that might compromise the protective value of the hat is essential. Paints, paint

thinners and some cleaning agents can weaken the shells of hard hats and may eliminate electrical resistance. Never drill holes, paint or apply labels to protective headgear as this may reduce the integrity of the protection. Do not store protective headgear in direct sunlight, such as on the rear window shelf of a car, since sunlight and extreme heat can damage them.

Hard hats with any of the following defects should be removed from service and replaced:

- Perforation, cracking, or deformity of the brim or shell;
- Indication of exposure of the brim or shell to heat, chemicals or ultraviolet light and other radiation (in addition to a loss of surface gloss, such signs include chalking or flaking).

Always replace a hard hat if it sustains an impact, even if damage is not noticeable. Suspension systems are offered as replacement parts and should be replaced when damaged or when excessive wear is noticed. It is not necessary to replace the entire hard hat when deterioration or tears of the suspension systems are noticed. **All hard hats must be replaced 5 years from date of manufacturing.**

Always wear your hard hat.....and keep your head in the game!