

Avoiding Head Injuries and Situational Awareness

Workplace injuries involving the head and skull can be severe and leave lasting visual and psychological scars. They have random sources and can happen while performing any type of work. Head injuries have many causes and avoiding them involves employees gaining a sense of situational awareness.

We usually think of head injuries as occurring during construction work. Highway personnel should wear personal protective equipment (PPE) like hard hats when overhead obstructions are present, but many more head injuries are sustained during other routine job functions. Slips, trips, and falls can result in head injuries, as can motor vehicle accidents, police interactions with combative arrestees, facility staff moving furniture, and even office staff striking an open door. When the overhead obstruction is stationary, it should be easy to notice and avoid. When the obstacle is moving, it may be more difficult but still manageable. Getting struck in the head by another person, especially for a police officer, is even more challenging to anticipate and avoid. Situational awareness can help in each of these circumstances.



Perhaps the best defense for preventing significant head injuries is for staff to develop situational awareness. This includes understanding the work environment, accounting for the potential hazards, and avoiding or minimizing those hazards.

Examples of this follow below:

- Avoid distractions while driving, walking, and working.
- Avoid carrying items in the presence of obstructions.
- Law enforcement should remain alert when deploying tasers or backup officers in the presence of a potentially hostile public.
- Mechanics should be advertent when working under low-clearance vehicles and controlling movements.
- Laborers lifting and securing debris onto trucks should be aware of their surroundings.
- Attentive highway staff feeding brush into chippers wearing PPE and removing obstructive limbs.
- While driving to and from work, observe traffic, obey traffic laws, and drive defensively to avoid incidents.

The keys are to be aware of your work surroundings, use measured movements around obstructions, and adjust your work to protect from such injuries.