

Are You Using Safety Helmets Correctly?

Personal protective equipment (PPE) at the highway or DPW garage has always included a quintessential item: hard hats. OSHA recently updated its guidelines to require an improved safety helmet. Safety helmets must be worn when there is any overhead obstruction, the potential to be struck by a falling object at work sites, or electrical hazards with accidental head contact. Review the following information on your safety helmet equipment and procedures:

- Why did OSHA switch to safety helmets?
 - Safety helmets include various functions beyond the typical construction-setting use, they provide added side-impact protections, include chinstraps for improved securement, are better fit to protect the wearer during rotational motion, and have improved venting for removing trapped heat.
- Do they meet current standards?
 - Safety helmets undergo rigorous testing requirements, ensuring they are of the highest quality to prevent head impact injuries. Current OSHA compliance calls for hard hats to meet ANSI Z89.1-2009 head protection standards.
- What are the types of head protection?
 - Head protection is classified into two impact types with three electrical classes:
 - Type I: protection from blows to the top of the head
 - Type II: protection from blows to the top and side of the head
 - Class G: General, designed to reduce exposure to low-voltage conductors
 - Class E: Electrical, designed to reduce exposure to high voltage conductors
 - Class C: Conductive, not intended to protect against contact with electrical hazards.
- How long can you keep helmets?
 - It depends on the type and manufacturer, but in general, it is recommended that head protection devices be updated every five years.



- When should helmets be inspected?
 - Before every use, the wearer should take a few minutes to inspect their head protection for damage, cracks, dings, worn straps, missing insulation or padding, and torn straps. Also, test the helmet by squeezing it with both hands and applying force. If you hear squeaking or unusual sounds, the unit should be replaced.
- Are helmets interchangeable between employees?
 - There are a few reasons why safety helmets should be issued to specific personnel and not shared. First, sharing PPE can create hygiene issues. More frequent cleaning and disinfection may be required. Second, it can be especially dangerous if there is unreported damage. Lastly, helmets are generally adjustable, so if they are shared for occasional work, each user must understand how to adjust the straps or bands for a proper fit.
- What is the proper fit of a safety helmet?
 - Newer safety helmets have head-cushion bands that are often one-hand adjustable and chin straps. Chin straps are an important improvement, securing the head during rotational motion and slip-and-fall incidents. A good test to see if a helmet is adjusted properly is to bend at the waist to a 90-degree angle. If the helmet does not fall off, it is safely adjusted.

OSHA recently published a bulletin on the differences between traditional hard hats and the new safety helmets, read it [here](#). You can view the information on each hard hat including manufacturer, ANSI standard, type, class, size, and date of manufacture on the inside. Remember that head protection is vital for overhead, falling, and electrical head-contact hazards. Be sure all applicable staff are issued adequate head protection and wear it! Contact Robert Blaisdell, Director of Loss Control, for additional information at rblaisdell@wrightinsurance.com