TOOLBOX TALK #44

PROPER USE OF HEAD PROTECTION – PART 1

Proper head protection is a must whenever work environments have the potential for falling objects; struck-by or overhead electrical hazards; and risks from slips, trips and falls. In these situations, both employers and workers can take steps to make sure proper head protection is a routine part of the job. Here are two questions to ask yourself about head protection. In Part 2, we ask two more questions.

Is the right type being used?
Some safety professionals have observed workers wearing "bump caps" when a hard hat or safety helmet was needed. A bump cap is designed to protect a worker's head from minor impact. A hard hat or safety helmet provides protection against more substantial blows.

Another example is using Type I head protection to guard against a side impact. Type I head protection is designed specifically for potential strikes to the top of the head, OSHA says. Type II protection, meanwhile, guards against impacts to other parts of the head in addition to the top.

Wearing Class C (conductive) head protection when electrical hazards are present is another example of incorrect head protection use. Class E (electrical) head protection shields a worker against up to 20,000 volts (phase to ground), while Class G (general) provides electrical protection typically up to 2,200 volts.

Have I conducted a hazard assessment?
Safety pros can determine what kind of head protection is appropriate by performing a hazard assessment, which is required by OSHA. In it's construction standard, OSHA states that employers are "responsible for requiring the wearing of appropriate personal protective equipment in all operations where there is an exposure to hazardous conditions."

To understand those "hazardous conditions" and determine the appropriate PPE needed, employers need to perform an assessment. In addition to protecting against falling objects or electrical shock, employers need to look at other risks like chemical exposures; hot work; high and low temperatures; and "whether integrated face shield, hearing protection, communication devices or personal lighting may be required.