

TOOLBOX TALK #45

PROPER USE OF HEAD PROTECTION – PART 2

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 1, we asked two other questions.



Is it being worn correctly?

Under a recent Final Rule, OSHA requires all PPE worn by construction workers to fit properly. The agency called poorly fitting PPE “a long-standing safety concern, particularly among some women as well as among physically smaller or physically larger workers.” Asking these questions can help gauge if head protection fits properly:

- Is the head protection centered on the head?
- Is the headband resting comfortably on the worker’s forehead?
- Does the chinstrap have a snug fit?
- Is there about one inch of clearance between the head and the hardhat shell?

Another issue: Workers often don’t have the suspension on their head protection properly adjusted. The suspension is important because it allows for a secure fit and creates a gap between the shell and the head. This design helps the hard hat absorb forces from an impact such as a fall, reducing what’s transferred to the worker’s head. Regarding the one inch of clearance, it’s not uncommon to see workers wearing a hoodie, cap or other items under their head protection. These items can interfere with that clearance between the shell and the head.

Products designed to be worn under head protection (winter liners and sunshades, for example) are available. Consult with the head protection manufacturer before using. Some workers may wear their head protection backwards when it’s not designed to be worn that way. To find out, check out the head protection itself. The models that are designed (and certified) to be worn backwards are marked as such.

Is it being regularly inspected?

At a minimum, head protection should be inspected before each work shift. Workers should check for cracks, dents and other damage. OSHA recommends running your fingers over the surface to make sure no irregularities exist. For head protection that has a chin strap, examine it for cuts, tears, fraying or any other issues.

If an impact occurs, head protection should be replaced immediately – even if the damage isn’t evident. Impact can weaken the material or cause suspension issues, which may not be immediately noticeable but can affect the headgear’s ability to protect you in the future.