

SPOT THE SAFETY VIOLATION: Improper Use of PPE Renders It Ineffective



How effectively do you think this worker's hardhat and ear plugs are protecting him'



[learn_more caption="Click for Answer"]

A basic principle of workplace safety is that if you can't engineer away a safety hazard or protect workers from it through administrative measures, such as safe work procedures, they should use PPE. But for that PPE to be effective, workers must 1) use it and 2) use it correctly.

In this picture, the good news is that the worker has a hardhat and ear plugs. The bad news is that he's not wearing the ear plugs at all and so isn't protecting his hearing from excessive noise.

And although he *is* wearing the hardhat, it's doubtful that it's providing effective head protection given that it's perched at the top of his turban. For example, if something fell on the front section of the worker's head, he'd probably be seriously injured as that area has no protection at all.

But the hardhat on the turban does raise an interesting safety issue: If the worker is wearing the turban for religious reasons, can you require him to remove it so he can properly wear the hardhat and thus be safe on the job?

Drawing the line between religious freedom and workplace safety is tricky. If wearing a hardhat is a 'bona fide occupational requirement,' such as because the workplace is an active construction site, you should try to accommodate the worker's religion by:

- Making an exception to the hardhat policy, if you can still keep the worker safe;
- Reassigning the worker to duties or a worksite where the hardhat isn't required;
- Changing the worker's schedule so he can avoid exposure to the hazard addressed by the hardhat; and
- Asking the OHS regulator for an exception from compliance with the OHS requirement that relates to the hardhat.

Go to Safety Smart for safety talks, puzzles, articles and other resources on head protection. Not a Safety Smart member? Sign up for a free trial.

8 Ways to Get Workers to Wear PPE

Here are eight strategies you can use to get workers to wear PPE, such as ear plugs and hardhats (read the full piece online for more details):

- 1. Set an example.** Show workers what's expected of them by using PPE yourself in the workplace whenever it's required.
- 2. Don't make exceptions.** If it's a requirement that PPE be used in a designated work area, then require everyone to adhere to that policy.
- 3. Don't look the other way.** If you ever witness a PPE violation, never ignore it.
- 4. Spend the money.** Make sure the company invests in quality PPE.
- 5. Don't stop with training.** Training is only the beginning. Show and remind workers how important PPE is throughout the regular course of the day.
- 6. Give workers a good reason.** Remind workers of who they're staying safe for, such as their spouses, kids, pets, parents, etc.

7. Don't let workers off the hook. Remind workers that, under OHS law, they also play a part in being responsible for safety on the job.

8. Discipline violators. Inconsistent discipline for PPE violations undercuts morale. Show workers you mean business by disciplining them for PPE infractions consistently and according to your written policy and/or collective agreement.

For more information, articles and tools, such as a Model PPE Policy, on complying with the PPE requirements under the OHS laws, including those for fall protection and respiratory protection, go to the OHS Insider's PPE topic page.

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