

Spot The Safety Violation: Protect Workers' Heads & Brains



This worker is missing a key piece of PPE that's commonly worn by every worker on every construction site. What is it'



June is Brain Injury Awareness Month. According to [Brain Injury Canada](#), 160,000 Canadians sustain brain injuries each year.

Hardhats are a critical piece of PPE intended to protect workers from head and brain injuries. But hardhats only protect workers from such injuries if they actually wear this equipment.

Hardhats should be ubiquitous on a construction site. But this picture from [elCOSH](#) shows a worker on what's clearly a construction site and he isn't wearing a hardhat, just a bandana. (He also doesn't appear to be wearing any PPE to protect his eyes and face from flying debris or dust from the saw he's using.)

Wearing a hardhat can prevent a worker from suffering a head or brain injury or minimize the extent of the injuries.

Example: In Ontario, a 2.4-metre piece of aluminum weighing between 27 and 31 kilograms fell from the seventh floor of a building under construction and onto a worker's head. Fortunately, he was wearing a hardhat. So although the force of the impact still caused serious injuries, the police credit his hardhat with saving his life.

Take 5 Steps to Protect Workers' Heads & Brains

The use of hardhats is generally covered in the [requirements in the OHS regulations for protecting workers' heads](#). To ensure you comply with these requirements, [take these basic steps](#):

Step #1: Determine if Safety Headwear Is Required

The use of safety headwear is generally required when workers are exposed to the risk of injury to their heads by falling, flying or thrown objects, or other harmful contacts (such as with hazardous substances or electricity). And some workplaces' most notably construction sites are presumed to pose a safety hazard to workers' heads and so safety headwear is usually required by all workers in such workplaces.

Step #2: Determine Appropriate Type of Safety Headwear

Next, determine the appropriate type of safety headwear, which in most cases will be some type of hardhat. This determination may be based on the nature of the head hazards. For example, if a worker may be exposed to electrical hazards, the safety headgear should have an appropriate non-conductive rating. And most jurisdictions require safety headwear to comply with a standard such as CSA Z94.1'05, *Industrial Protective Headwear*.

In addition, hardhats may need to be red, orange or another very visible color or have reflective decals if worker visibility is a safety issue. You may also need to ensure that workers have liners for their hardhats if they'll be working in or exposed to cold conditions. And safety headwear may require some kind of retention system such as a chin strap if workers are working at heights, in windy conditions or in other circumstances in which their hardhats could get dislodged.

Step #3: Provide or Require Workers to Provide Appropriate Headwear

Once you've figured out the appropriate type of safety headwear, either provide such head protection for workers or ensure that they provide their own headwear. Regardless of [who pays for or provides](#) the safety headwear, it *must* comply with

the OHS requirements.

Step #4: Set Rules for Use & Care of Safety Headwear

Set appropriate safety rules for the use and care of safety headwear. At a minimum, your rules should require workers to:

- Wear safety headwear when needed or required by your OHS program or OHS law;
- Ensure their safety headwear is the correct size and fits well;
- Clean their safety headwear using only appropriate cleansers, such as basic soap and water—not toxic solvents, which can degrade the hard shell;
- Inspect their hardhats—both the shell and suspension system—for any damage that could undermine its effectiveness, such as cracks, dents, holes or torn suspension components;
- Replace their safety headwear whenever it's been struck by something—even if it doesn't appear to be damaged; and
- Properly store safety headwear when it's not in use so it doesn't get damaged;

Your safety rules should also prohibit workers from doing the following:

- Wearing casual hats such as baseball hats in lieu of or underneath hardhats;
- Using damaged or defective safety headwear;
- Carrying items inside their hardhats (unless permitted by the manufacturer);
- Wearing headwear backwards (again unless permitted by the manufacturer and in compliance with any additional conditions, such as reversing the suspension); and
- Painting hardhats or affixing decals to them.

Step #5: Train Workers on Safety Headwear Rules

As always, train workers on your rules for safety headwear and ensure that workers understand these rules and comply with them on the job. For example, give them this [handout](#) as an accompaniment to a toolbox talk on head safety. You should also periodically review these rules with workers. And when you see a worker such as the one in the picture without a hardhat when one is required, remind him of these rules, insist that he immediately put on a hardhat and impose appropriate [discipline](#) if necessary.