Spot The Safety Violation: Take 5 Steps to Protect Workers' Heads

Is the worker in the forefront of this picture wearing his hardhat correctly' What could he learn from his two co-workers'

PPE, such as safety headwear and respiratory protection, is a last resort in many ways. That is, you should first try to eliminate or minimize a safety hazard through engineering controls and then use administrative controls, if necessary. Require workers to use PPE to protect them from a hazard only if engineering and administrative controls aren't sufficient. Because PPE may be the last safeguard standing between a worker and a hazard, it's critical that workers wear such equipment when necessary'and do so properly.

This picture from elCOSH shows three workers wearing hardhats'but only two are doing so correctly. The worker in

the forefront of the picture is wearing his hardhat backwards, which is generally unsafe unless specifically permitted by the manufacturer. And even then, wearing it backwards may only be permitted for certain tasks or if the worker also reverses the hat's inside suspension. Plus, it appears that the hardhat is barely sitting on the very top of the worker's head and could very easily fall off completely.

Wearing hardhats properly can literally mean the difference between life and death.

Hardhat saves worker: A 70 lb. metal beam fell from the 7th storey of a condo development and struck a worker on the head, face and torso. He was taken to the hospital in serious condition but survived. Police credited the worker's hardhat with saving his life.

Lack of hardhat results in fatality: A worker making a delivery to a construction project parked his truck and stepped from the vehicle when he was hit by a one-pound tape measure, which had slipped off the belt of a worker at the top of the tower under construction. The man, who *wasn't* wearing a hardhat at the time, was struck in the head and later died.

Take 5 Steps to Protect Workers' Heads

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'and periodically review these rules with workers. These dos and don'ts for headwear are some examples of basic rules to include:

- **Do** inspect headwear before each use. (Use this

checklist.)

- **Do** replace headwear that has been struck’even if no damage is visible.
- **Do** clean the suspension and shell regularly according to the manufacturer’s instructions.
- **Do** remove and destroy any headwear if its protective abilities are in doubt.
- **Don’t** transport headwear in rear windows of vehicles.
- **Don’t** paint the plastic shell. Paint solvents can make the plastic brittle and more susceptible to cracks.
- **Don’t** use winter liners that contain metal or electrically conductive material underneath Class G or E headwear.
- **Don’t** put anything between the suspension and the shell.

Step #5: Train Workers on Safety Headwear Rules

As always, train workers on your rules for safety headwear and ensure that they understand and comply with these rules on the job. For example, give them this handout as an accompaniment to a toolbox talk on head safety.

In addition, encourage workers to remind their co-workers to wear hardhats properly. Two of the workers in the picture are wearing their hardhats correctly. So they should’ve pointed out to the third worker that wearing his hat as he was didn’t really protect his head at all.