Don’t Let an Injury Go to Your Head

What’s at Stake?

Head injuries are one of the most serious types of injuries that can occur at work. Injuries to your head can cause short and long-term disability, ongoing health problems such as, memory issues, cognitive and physical issues. Head injuries can be caused by, among other things, falling or flying objects, falling, slipping, or tripping, electrical shock, or by bumping your head against a fixed object.

What’s the Danger?

The result of a head injury can range from cuts, bruises, and bumps that are visible, to a headache, concussion, cracked skull, internal bleeding in the brain, or death.

Other complications from a head injury include:

- Sensitivity to light and sound.
- Dizziness, headaches.
- Difficulty concentrating, sleep disturbance, and varying degrees of consciousness.
- Depression.
- Problems understanding and difficulty communicating with others.
- Seizures.
- Buildup of fluid on the brain.
- Issues with problem-solving.
- Changes in behavior, and difficulty with social interaction.

How to Protect Yourself

First, be aware of and avoid slip, trip, and fall hazards such as:

- Slippery sidewalks, floors and other surfaces.
- Unsafe stairs and areas that are not adequately lit.
- Obstructions in walkways.

Second, wear head protection whenever you work in any of the following areas:

- Areas where objects might fall from above and strike you on the head;
- Areas where there could be head contact with electrical hazards; or
- Areas where you might bump your head against fixed objects, such as exposed pipes or beams.

Third, know what you're putting on your head:

- When choosing a hard hat, you must pick one that provides the right level of protection based on the type of location of work.
    - According to ANSI/ISEA Z89.1-2009 and Canadian CSA Z94.1-2005 standards, hard hat electrical performance is divided into three categories:
        - Class G (general) helmets: Designed to reduce the danger of contact with low-voltage conductors and are proof tested at 2,200 volts.
        - Class E (electrical) helmets: Designed to reduce the danger of contact with conductors at higher voltage levels and are proof tested at 20,000 volts.
        - Class C (conductive) helmets: Provide no protection against contact with electrical hazards.
    - Hard hat impact protection is divided into two categories:
        - Type I Hard Hats are designed to reduce the force of impact resulting from a blow only to the top of the head, such as a tool falling from above.
        - Type II Hard Hats are designed to reduce the force of a side impact resulting from a blow

which may be received off-center, from the side, or to the top of the head. This form of impact might result from contact with the sharp corner of a side beam for example.

- You also want to look for features such as the ability to adjust the hard hat suspension.
- For maximum protection, hard hats must be worn with the bill facing forward, unless otherwise noted on the hard hat label.
- Helmets and suspension systems must be inspected daily, maintained as necessary, and replaced promptly when damaged.

Final Word

Head trauma can leave a lasting impression. Take the necessary precautions to make sure a falling tool, a fall, or unexpected beam edge, doesn’t go to your head.