Head Off the Blows

The hardhat is an essential piece of safety gear no construction worker should be without.

Not all hardhats are made equal, however. Some provide only minor protection, while others are designed to protect workers from falling objects and electric shocks as high as 20,000 volts.

Here’s an overview of the three classes of hardhats and things to consider when selecting the hardhat best suited to protect your most important asset—your brain.

Hardhats come in three classes:

Class A hardhats are designed for general use and are used regularly by workers in construction. They insulate workers from electrical shocks up to 2,200 volts and protect the head from falling or flying objects.

Class B hardhats are similar to Class A hardhats but are designed for workers who perform electrical work. This type of hardhat protects workers from falling objects and is rated for shock protection up to 20,000 volts.

Lightweight Class C hardhats are designed for comfort and provide only basic, limited protection. They will protect a worker who bumps into a fixed object but will not protect against falling objects or electric shock.

Here are some things to consider when choosing a hardhat:

- Choose a hardhat with a chin strap if you work at elevations.
- Consider your needs before buying a new hardhat. Some hardhats can be modified to add a face shield, goggles or hearing protection.
- Don’t wear your hardhat backwards, except when welding.
- Inspect your hardhat daily for dents, cracks or frays that could weaken it. Toss and replace any inferior hardhat.

- Don’t tamper with your hardhat. This includes drilling holes in it or using paint thinners or other solvents that could weaken the shell and eliminate electrical resistance.
- Never personalize your hardhat with paint or stickers that could hide cracks.
- Take care of your hardhat and it will take care of you. Clean it periodically using warm water and mild detergent. Submerge the hat in warm water for one minute, then scrub and rinse it in clean warm water. Don’t use solvents or harsh cleansers.
- Store your hardhat away from heat and direct sunlight, which can weaken it.

Replace any hardhat that has been struck by an object or has deteriorated, even if the damage is not visible. Don’t take chances with head protection.