

Why Construction Contractors are Switching from Hard Hats to Helmets

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The design of hard hats in the construction industry has not changed much over the last 40 years. The material used to make them has shifted from aluminum to plastic, but the core design – a brimmed shell attached to a suspended, adjustable headband – has remained essentially the same.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, at least 992 construction workers from 2011 through 2015 had brain injury-related fatalities. In fact, traumatic brain injuries during this time frame account for approximately 25% of all fatal construction accidents. The data does not indicate how many of these fatalities started with a fall.

When an employee trips and falls, his or her hard hat can become dislodged before impact, which is when it is most required to prevent or reduce injury. As understanding of this additional risk became better known in construction circles, some general contractors have begun switching from hard hats to helmets. Most safety professionals in construction agree that helmets are better suited to prevent head injuries during falls and impact-type incidents.

Workers in construction can benefit from safety helmets not only because they shield against falling objects, but certain models (Type II) can offer increased

protection from impacts to the side and back of the head. This is because Type II helmets are designed to diminish lateral impacts to the head, such as a blow resulting walking into the sharp corner of a beam.

Certain large construction contractors have already begun using helmets on the majority of their projects. Additionally, many countries outside the United States have adopted or been motivated by the EN industrial helmet standards that are in place in the European Union and the UK. These standards require that safety helmets must be designed to protect against lateral deformation of the helmet, penetration (from sharp/pointed objects), as well as absorb vertical shocks (objects impacting the helmet from above). As a result, helmets, as opposed to hard hats, are in use on construction sites across Australia, Europe, Asia, and Africa. ANSI standards in the United States do not have similar requirements at this time.

Construction companies may have to spend a little more money upfront to replace hard hats with helmets, but the return on investment in worker safety can be substantial. This transition may be difficult, as many construction workers may be hesitant to leave behind hard hats, but the safety and long-term cost benefits will likely make helmets the best choice for most contractors.



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Sources

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