

Tear this out and share with your crew



SAFETY WATCH

by Marcia Gruver

Just 14 ounces

That's how much the average safety hard hat weighs. That's not very much when you consider how much protection it provides.

The near accident: A New York State Department of Transportation worker started sand blasting a bridge in preparation for painting. Although it's a departmental rule that hard hats must be worn, the job circumstances seemed safe. He wasn't under traffic, nor was he under an overhead hazard. But several feet away from the worker, a steel hatch suddenly blew off the top of the pressure blasting equipment. The 100-pound hatch flew through the air and struck the worker square on the top of his head. Although the impact knocked him to the ground, he had no significant injuries. He was wearing his hard hat.

The bottom line: The reason for wearing a hard hat is simple: Your brain is the control center of the body. The slightest damage to any part of the brain can cause extreme malfunction or death. Although the skull normally protects the brain, all bets are off on the jobsite.



"A hard hat not only gives protection, but it's a symbol, too. It shows the person who's wearing it has brains and they want to keep them."

—Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration

The hazards to your head come in many forms, including falling and flying objects. Even a small object – say a bolt – can gain incredible force if it falls at a significant distance. Then there's the fact you can be just plain clumsy and bump your head. And to put the cherry on top all of a hard hat's

positives: it gives you more visibility on the jobsite.

Still, workers can be reluctant to don that extra 14 ounces of protection. It adds weight and, some complain, heat. (But wait: according to the Associated General Contractors of America, studies show that the temperature inside a hard hat used in 110-degree temperatures can actually be 5 to 12 degrees cooler than the outside air.) Then there's the matter of fit: you need to make sure your hard hat conforms to both your head and the type of work you do – the variety of styles and types on the market ensure you can find a hard hat that's right for you.

Whatever the complaints, you can't argue against this one: it saves lives. There's one big condition, however. It's got to be worn. It can't be in the front seat of your pickup, sitting on the ground or even held in your hand. There may not be any apparent hazards around you, but conditions can change in a hurry. Just ask that worker from New York. **EW**

OSHA just released a ruling requiring employers to pay for the personal protective equipment they specify for a job. For more information on this ruling go to http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=FEDERAL_REGISTER&p_id=20094

Information for this Safety Watch was gathered from the New York State Department of Transportation and the Associated General Contractors of America. It is meant for general information only; for more detailed information go to www.osha.gov.