

Hard Hats

Commonly Asked Questions

Q. *Does my hard hat have an "expiration date" that tells me when to replace it?*

A. A common misconception is that hard hats have a predetermined service life - that is not the case. Both the 1986 and 1997 ANSI standards address service life under maintenance and care of the hard hat. The standards state that all hard hat components should be inspected daily for signs of dents, cracks, penetration and any damage due to impact, rough treatment, or wear. Although it is not considered a "shelf life", MSA brand hard hats do have "Useful Service Life Guidelines". These guidelines suggest replacing the suspension every 12 months and the hard hat after 5 years of use. What you should remember is that any hard hat that fails the daily inspection should be removed from service until the problem is corrected.

Remember too, in addition to everyday wear and tear, ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which includes sunlight, can pose a problem for hats constructed of plastic materials. Damage caused by UV radiation is easy to spot: the hat will lose its glossy finish and eventually take on a chalky appearance. Further UV radiation damage could cause the shell to actually start flaking away. Once the effects of UV radiation are detected, the hard hat shell should be immediately replaced.

Q. *Can I wear a baseball hat under my hard hat?*

A. No, I would not recommend it. There is more fabric on a baseball hat than on say, a welders cap or bandana which usually fit tight to the head. Because of the extra fabric, workers tend to loosen the suspension system on the hat. This is a bad idea, because if you are struck by a glancing blow to one side of the hard hat, the suspension system could come down quickly and could cut into your ear!

Q. *Can I put decals on my hard hat?*

A. In most instances, yes. However, you will need to be attentive to your daily inspection to look for signs of dents, cracks, penetration and any damage due to impact, rough treatment, or wear.

Q. *Can hard hats be painted?*

A. ANSI Z89.1-2003 Appendix A4 states that caution should be exercised when painting hard hat shells because some paints and thinners attack and damage the shell and reduce protection levels. The hard hat manufacturer should be consulted before painting.

Q. *Can I wear my hard hat backward?*

A. Maybe. Ask your employer if your company PPE Hazard Assessment allows employees to wear the hard hat backwards. Then, check the helmet for the "reverse donning arrow"  marking. The current 2009 edition addresses the issues of reverse wearing of hard hats. The standard now provides a non-mandatory test protocol that will allow manufacturers of hard hats to test the helmet and be marked with the "reverse donning arrow" . This means the helmet can be worn frontward or backward **in accordance with the manufacturer's wearing instructions.**