

Workplace hard hat safety survey results



Introduction

Construction sites without the correct protection can potentially be very dangerous places, especially when it comes to head injuries. To help understand the scale of the issue and identify potential areas for improvement, Headway and leading safety manufacturer Centurion surveyed people who work in the construction industry to find out more about their understanding of head injury, personal protection equipment and the support they receive from their employers.

Brain injury is more common than you think, and its impact can be life-changing for both the individual hurt but also their wider family. Ensuring your head protection is worn and cared for correctly is key to remaining safe.

Head injury and workplace safety facts:

- There were 348,453 UK admissions to hospital with acquired brain injury in 2016-17. That is 531 admissions per 100,000 of the population.
- 20% of all injuries whether fatal and non-fatal in the UK since 2013 are head related.
- Of all non-fatal injuries reported under Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations for 2017-18, 13% are head related.
- Head protection account for only 3% of PPE purchases, yet account for over 20% of injuries.
- On average people spend £25-£30 on a pair of safety boots, but only £5-£8 on their safety helmet.

A total of 486 participants completed our survey, which remained open from 27th January to 30th April 2020.

Participants were asked a series of questions relating to their knowledge of concussion and safety at work. Many were multiple-choice questions allowing participants to select zero or more responses.

Foreword by Chris Tidy Founder, Hard Hat Awareness Week

Welcome to the workplace hard hat safety survey results, being released on the first day of the inaugural Hard Hat Awareness Week.

It is Centurion's mission to safeguard the creativity and judgment that shapes our world and with 2020 being our 140th anniversary we wanted to do something special to celebrate.

We are therefore delighted to partner with the brain injury charity Headway to launch the first ever Hard Hat Awareness Week. The aim of the initiative is to raise funds for the invaluable work that Headway does while bringing a focus on the importance of being hat wise and looking after your hard hat so it will in turn look after your head.

On modern day construction sites there is widespread awareness of the need to wear a hard hat, but as the results of this survey illustrate, there is still a cavalier attitude to head injuries – 52% of workers surveyed said they had experienced a head injury which they did not report to their manager with only 6% of respondents of those injured seeking medical attention. This is despite growing evidence of the short- and long-term damage that can be inflicted by even a single knock to the head and brain injuries being far more common than many people think. Of further concern is the fact that head protection accounts for only 3% of PPE purchases, yet head injuries account for over 20% of overall injuries.

We believe it is time to redress this balance and we hope that this year's Hard Hat Awareness Week and the findings of this survey will initiate a shift in attitudes to hard hat safety and the wider issue of brain health. We are extremely pleased that several leading names in the construction sector have already pledged their support for the initiative including amey utilities, HSE network, Skanska, Costain, Strabag and CHAS and we hope many more will join us. You can help by taking a moment to digest the findings of our survey, following our campaign on social media, taking part in our raffle, and sharing images of your audited hard hats using the hashtag #hatwise.

Look after yourselves - and your hard hats.

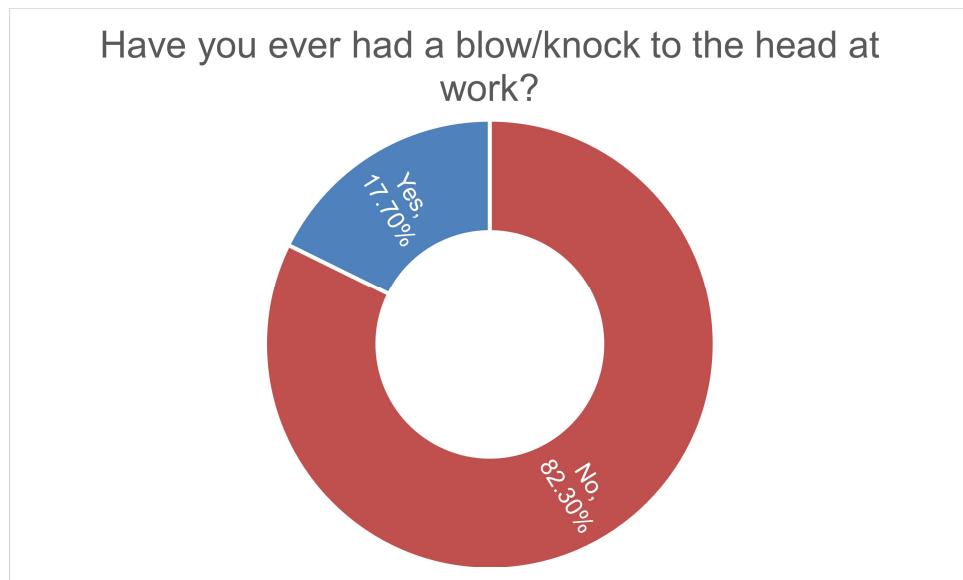


Key findings

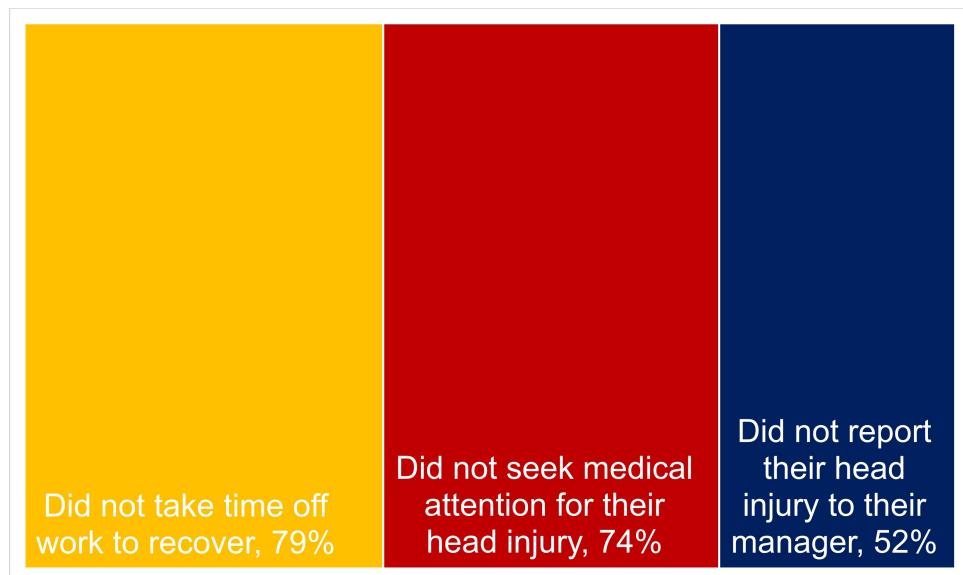
Section 1: Past injuries

Of these:

- **59** (12%) do not know what a concussion is
- **86** (18%) have experienced a blow to the head at work.



Among those who experienced a head injury at work:



- **52% did not report the incident to their manager**

Why not?

- 60% said they did not feel it was serious enough, indicating a lack of awareness of the potential effects of even a mild traumatic brain injury
- 9% meant to, but forgot
- 7% did not want to get in trouble
- 2% didn't know they needed to, indicating good awareness of the correct procedures.

"It was before safety helmets became mandatory and the bump was not significant"

"Was wearing a helmet, so didn't cause an injury and I often hit helmet during work."

"In those days the culture of reporting injuries was extremely poor."

- **26% sought medical attention for their head injury.**

Of those who didn't:

- 82% didn't think it was serious enough
- 5% didn't know they needed to
- 2% didn't want to get in trouble

"I was wearing a hard hat so there was no injury."

- **21% had time off work to recover.**

Of those who did take time off:

- 44% had between one day and one week off work
- 31% had more than three months off work

"After a check by first aider I was ok - had a new hard hat and stayed on the ground and near a colleague in case I did develop concussion or began to feel unwell."

Among all respondents:

- **24% are aware of colleagues in the construction industry who have had a head injury in the workplace.**

Section 2: Hard hat safety

Helmets are made from materials that have been specifically chosen for their durability, shock absorption and impact properties. They can be sensitive to ‘chemical attack’, so helmets should not be marked or have decals or labels applied to them¹.

- **42% have never painted, marked or applied decals or labels to their helmet.**

Of those who have:

- 15% have marked it with a felt-tip pen
- 36% have applied a sticker
- 25% have applied labels
- 8% have applied another marking to their helmet

If a helmet needs cleaning, owners should do so with warm, soapy water and a soft cloth. Survey respondents told us:

- **58% have never attempted to clean their hard hat**
- 41% cleaned it with water, as recommended
- Only 1% cleaned with solvents and abrasives, which can damage the helmet.

Storage in direct sunlight, extremes of temperature and in a fashion that is liable to distort the shell is not recommended and may reduce the life of the helmet.

- **15% of respondents have stored their hard hat in an unsuitable way**

Helmets have an expiry date, after which the wearer cannot be confident that the materials will provide adequate protection in the event of an impact. We asked respondents if they are aware of this, and how to find the date:

- **24% are unaware that exceeding the expiry date of a hard hat can reduce the level of protectivity**, including 16% who are unsure.
- 28% do not know where to find their helmet’s expiry date or were unaware it had one.

It is extremely important that a helmet is fit correctly to the wearer’s head, otherwise it may fail to protect them in the event of an impact. Wearing unlicensed headwear underneath the helmet can greatly impair the fit and reduce effectiveness.

- **29% of respondents wear unlicensed headwear underneath their helmet.**

¹ [Safety Helmet Wear And Care Guide](#) (Centurion Safety Products Ltd), 2018

Section 3: Safety in the workplace

- 85% of respondents felt their employer provides proper training and equipment for the job.

“Probably not, mainly assumed to learn from others such as Supervisors, or to know and understand the risks already.”

“Yes, always have the correct PPE and relevant H&S training courses.”

“Yes - open access to necessary and well fitting PPE. Annual training in variety of modules.”

“We are never told to check expiry dates so probably no.”

- 80% felt their employer creates a safe environment (using basic text analysis).

“Yes. Site specific risk assessments are always undertaken to identify what controls are required to eliminate or reduce risk.”

“Often reliant on the site contractor.”

“Yes. All works are risk assessed and any safety critical activities escalated for review.”

“Yes, the company allows me to stop work if I feel anything is unsafe and will back me up.”

“It depends on the specific contractors. Smaller, middle sized contractors tend to be less conscious of safety requirements.”

- 23% do not know what to do if they sustain a blow to the head (using basic text analysis).

Conclusion

The survey shows that awareness of concussion and workplace safety issues is high in the construction sector, clearly supported by most employers creating a safe environment for their staff with generally good training in health and safety issues.

However, with a significant proportion wearing unlicensed headgear underneath their hard hat, which can affect its ability to protect against head injuries, and many people unaware of how to care for their helmet, there is clearly still work to be done.

All incidences of head injury should be reported to a person's employer, however only 48% of people said they have done so. The main reason for this is that they did not feel it was severe enough – however at Headway we know that even seemingly minor blows to the head can lead to severe complications. Additionally, remaining on site after a blow to the head increases the risk of further damage from a second injury.

The issues raised in this study should help employers to identify areas for improvement in their training and on-site procedures, helping to build on an already strong knowledge-base and ensure that workers are adequately protected.