Do Hard Hats Expire?

**Issue:**

Safety helmets like most safety equipment have a limited life. However there is confusion in industry over what this lifespan is and when you need to replace the helmets. Considering the potential cost involved, it is important to understand how to inspect helmets and know what to do to maximum their lifespan.

**Legal Requirements:**

There is no regulation specifying the timing for replacement of hard hats e.g. when they arrive at the “manufacturers ‘used-by’ date”, marked in each helmet.

The Australian Standard AS/NZ 1800:1998 Occupational Protective Helmets – Selection, Care and Use outlines the recommendations in regard to care and maintenance of protective helmets, as:

a) Helmets should be replaced 3 years from date of issue. This is still subject to the frequency which the helmet is used and exposure that causes deterioration e.g. UV from sunlight, and should be based on the condition of the helmet (per below advice);

b) All components of a hard hat are to be visually inspected regularly (e.g. weekly) to ensure the hard hat is still in good condition;

c) Any helmet showing damage (e.g. dents, cracks or holes etc.) or deterioration (e.g. excessive discoloration or brittleness) should be removed from service immediately and replaced. Note: If a helmet has been stored in direct sunlight or exposed to heat (e.g. inside a locked car) the condition of the helmet would have deteriorated at a faster rate;

d) Any helmet known to be subjected to significant impact should also be discarded as a precaution;
e) Mark the date of issue on the helmet, which is different to the ‘manufacturer’s date’, and

f) The helmet harness typically deteriorates faster than other components and should be replaced every 2 years or sooner depending on the condition of the harness.

Be aware that any alteration to a safety helmet, contrary to the manufacturer’s instructions, is potentially risky. This includes:

- Stickers placed on helmets, which is a very common occurrence, and can potentially mask visual signs of damage to the helmet. Regular inspections to include internal visual checks is recommended to cope with this.
- Glue used by some stickers could degrade the plastic structure of the helmet shell, resulting in a shorter lifespan.
- Exposure to some workplace chemicals such as paints and cleaning solvents could also degrade the helmet or harness by weakening it and resulting in increased risk of damage to the wearer, and a shorter lifespan of the helmet.

If in doubt about whether a chemical is potentially degrading, consult the manufacturer or supplier for additional information.

**Key Recommendation:**

Don’t replace hard hats simply because they have reached their “manufacturer’s date”, but rather from their “issue date”, or when the hats are damaged or deteriorated (regardless of age).

**It is also recommended:**

1. Safety helmets and harnesses are visually inspected regularly for any signs of deterioration or damage and replaced where necessary, e.g. visual weekly and daily.
2. All hard hats are marked with **date of issue** and ensure a detailed inspection of the hard hat is conducted at 3 years from date of issue to certify if safe for continued use.
3. Replace harnesses at least every 2 years.
4. Ensure that employees are aware of the need to protect safety helmets from excessive exposure to sunlight, heat or chemicals. e.g. stored properly when not used.
Safety Helmet Inspection Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Action to be taken</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. a) Does the helmet shell (internal or external) show signs of wear or degradation e.g. colour faded, or stained?</td>
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<td>b) Are there any dents, cracks, nicks or gauges?</td>
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<td>c) Is the shell stiff, brittle, faded or appear dull or chalky?</td>
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<td>d) Does the shell’s surface flake or delaminate?</td>
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<td>2. Is the harness (suspension system) in good condition and properly secured in place?</td>
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<td>3. Is the helmet within three (3) years of date of issue?</td>
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<td>4. Is the harness within two (2) years of issue date?</td>
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<td>5. Is the helmet safe for continued use?</td>
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<td>If no replace helmet</td>
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</table>

Reviewed by

Date:

For more information on this topic contact Safety Action.