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## GOOD PRACTICE NOTE ROPE ACCESS CHAMBER

### Selection of a suitable helmet for working at height

There is a range of helmets available that comply with different performance standards. There is also an inexhaustible range of risks that exist with working at height. However, a few inherent risks that relate to the use of helmets are likely to be always present when any work at height is done.

#### These include:

1. Impacts on the helmet (on-and-off crown impacts) due to falling objects.
2. The helmet becoming dislodged from the user's head during use (e.g. when the user looks up, during windy conditions, or in the event of a fall taking place).
3. The helmet hooking onto a fixed object during use, or, more seriously, during a fall event.
4. Impacts to the user's head in the event of a fall.

SANS 1397 / EN 397 standard/s is the most commonly used helmet for work at height in South Africa. However, the specified performance criteria are conspicuously absent from tests that evaluate its effectiveness in protecting the user during a fall event. EN 12492 seems to provide the most suitable performance test criteria for helmets that are used in a fall risk environment.

None of the helmet performance tests consider the functions or implications of a helmet peak. Helmet peaks are presumably intended to provide extended cover over the user's face. However, during use and especially when looking up, the user is left exposing a greater percentage of their face than they would have in the absence of a peak, due to the user having to tilt their head further backwards in order to see past the peak. Notably, looking up seems to be a default reaction when a person is warned about an object falling towards them. The helmet peak could also act as a lever in the event of a fall, influencing its retention effectiveness, amongst other factors.

Construction specific risks will differ from construction site to construction site. Fall protection planners and work at height managers should consider the risks of the work at hand and select suitable head protection accordingly.

Careful consideration should be given to the risks listed above. However, for example, certain very specific construction tasks may favour the use of electrically insulated helmets, to the expense of helmets that have been tested for retention performance.

Currently, the most suitable and readily available performance standard for helmets for work at height is EN 12492. The IWH recommends using helmets that address the risks listed above (i.e. helmets that conform to EN 12492), even if at the expense of other properties, such as electrical insulation.

The selection of helmets that comply with other performance standards should be clearly and carefully justified in risk management documents and the fall protection plan for the work. The implications and associated risks of using helmets with peaks should be carefully evaluated when selecting suitable helmets.

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