

OCTOBER 21, 2019

HARD HATS SYMBOLIZE SAFETY FOR A FULL CENTURY

When Edward W. Bullard returned to the United States in 1919, he had an idea for his father's mining supply company: build a helmet for miners and other laborers, emulating the metal helmet he had worn while serving in the cavalry in France.

What Bullard didn't know is that his idea would change the face of safety, even many generations later. The New York Times explained Bullard's story in a feature on "[The Evolution of the Hard Hat](#)," describing how the protective gear has evolved over the years - now celebrating its 100th anniversary - and has even become associated with both patriotism and authority. Increasingly, wearers are proud to put on a hard hat as a visual representation of their hard work and their journey in the trade. For some, their hard hat serves as a billboard, a talisman, and a resume of the projects they've worked on and the skylines they've built. It becomes a deeply personal piece of equipment - they'll likely draw blood if you attempt to mess with their hard hat.

Fast forward 100 years from Bullard's idea and hard hats are one of the symbols of the strong safety culture we [help our clients establish](#). The design of hard hats has changed over the years and safety helmets are now grabbing increasing market share. What used to be a rather bland form of personal protective equipment (PPE) with limited features is now available in a variety of styles, features, attachments, colors and graphics. Prices range from the mild \$15.00 to the eye-popping \$150.00 and more - quite a change from the helmet envisioned by Mr. Bullard.

What hasn't changed? The integral role that head protection plays in mitigating the

risk of head injuries in jobs where there's an increased risk of it from "impact, falling or flying objects, or from electrical shock and burns" (thanks, OSHA). Although hard hats are buried at the bottom of the **hierarchy of hazard controls** along with other forms of PPE as the least effective of controls, they still serve a vital role in the protection of the wearer and the representation of a safety mindset. Anyone who knows someone who sustained a serious head injury likely knows how such injuries can alter personality, impair ability and decrease quality of life. Since personality is bound up in the mind, it's worth protecting as if life depends upon it.

New technology, like wearables, has emerged in recent years with the goal of **improving safety** in the construction industry, but the hard hat – plain or fancy – will continue to be around for the long haul. What iconic tools or equipment will next celebrate their own centennial as the construction industry evolves? That part is unclear. For now, we'll pay tribute to the hard hat – a universal badge of safety for the last 100 years.



JEFFREY A. SPATZ, CHST

Senior Safety Consultant

jspatz@grahamco.com

The Graham Building

Philadelphia, PA, 19102

215-701-5454