

FIRE FIGHTERS GUIDANCE NOTE # 4-6

ISSUE: FIREFIGHTER HELMET FIT

It is generally recognized that helmet fit is important for a firefighter helmet to provide optimum protection against heat and impact from falling objects. As well, proper fit generally contributes to reduced wearer fatigue. Better fit and improved comfort encourage firefighters to wear their helmets at all times.

It is interesting to note that none of the recognized standards on firefighter helmets, including the current "Ontario Code for Head Protection" actually deal with the issue of helmet fit. However, NFPA 1972, 1992 Edition says in part under 2.5.1 "product labelling" that **"THE HELMET MUST BE PROPERLY ADJUSTED AND SECURED IN PLACE. FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THESE INSTRUCTIONS MAY RESULT IN SERIOUS INJURY OR DEATH"**.

Modern day fire fighting requires firefighters to wear helmets that include the use of balaclavas. Such wear can be during structural fires, high angle rescues or during auto extrications. These different operations which may require the use of a balaclava, or self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA), usually result in activities causing rapid movements that favour a snug fitting helmet.

Standard helmet headbands require trial and error to remove tabs and adjust fit. Basically, this renders them a one size for all operations when time is of the essence. A loose helmet may increase the risk of injury to a firefighter.

Therefore, the Fire Service Health and Safety Advisory Committee recommend that Fire Departments, when purchasing new or replacement helmets, purchase those that accommodate mechanisms (headbands) that can be easily adjusted. This allows for rapid adjustment, thus meeting specific needs of Firefighters, while complying with the requirements of his or her employer. Although new designs may be forthcoming from manufacturers that will meet these requirements, presently headbands with a ratchet suspension address these needs.