



MEMORANDUM
September 26, 2013

RULE 304(c) Protective Equipment - Enforcement Guidelines

In June 2013, the USA Hockey Board of Directors passed rule changes that will evolve our game through the 2013-17 seasons. Among the changes is a strong theme of player safety and prevention of injuries. One such change was a NOTE added to Rule 304(c) related to helmets that acknowledges that HECC stickers now include an expiration date that de-certifies the helmet if the date has passed. This added language has created additional confusion in regards to the mandate that all youth players are wearing a properly certified HECC helmet -- the following information will clarify the expectations as it relates to enforcement.

USA Hockey has mandated for over 30 years that youth players wear a HECC approved helmet and the added NOTE to Rule 304(c) does not change the rule. However, the NOTE does draw attention to, and create awareness, that HECC has recently added an expiration date to the sticker and designates that any helmet that has outlasted this date is no longer considered HECC certified and is ineligible for use in USA Hockey sanctioned games where HECC approved helmets are required. The purpose of the expiration date is to acknowledge that time and use may have an effect on the protective qualities of the helmet that would prevent it from continuing to meet the minimum standards of protection. HECC has established the 6 and ½ year lifespan of the certification to coincide with the length of time that the helmet maintains its necessary protective qualities.

While the HECC standards are critical to player safety, the spirit and intent of the rule has not changed in regards to enforcement by officials. A player's participation in a game should not depend on whether the HECC Sticker is in place or missing from his/her helmet. The guidelines the USA Hockey Officiating Program encourages its officials to follow are outlined in the *Officials Rules and Casebook* in addition to the following key points:

- Are all the components of the helmet in place (ear pieces, face-mask J-clips, etc.)?
- Is the helmet free of excessive wear and in good condition?
- Does the helmet look similar to models worn by other players?
- Is the helmet worn properly (fit, chin-strap buckled, etc.)?

If the official can answer these questions with a "yes" then the helmet is likely safe and legal for play and the game does not need a long delay to complete this check. If in doubt, the presence of the current HECC sticker, with valid expiration date, along with the good condition of the helmet, will be the final indicator as to the eligibility for use in USA Hockey sanctioned games. Provided the official(s) have performed this due diligence, it is important to acknowledge that **USA Hockey firmly places the responsibility on the individual player to wear the proper protective equipment in the manner in which it was intended.**

The USA Hockey Playing Rules will always promote fair play, skill development, and above all player safety. A firm understanding and application of the "spirit and intent" of all the playing rules by all on-ice officials will assist in creating a positive environment for all participants.

