

Noise Protection at Work

Hearing Conservation Program

We experience noise exposures daily: at home, at play and at work. Normally these exposures are not harmful. But noise that is too loud, too close or last too long can cause hearing loss. Loud noises can damage delicate structures inside our inner ear. Damage to these structures can cause permanent hearing loss.

How noisy is the equipment you work around?

- Handsaw: 85 dB
- Forklift: 87 dB
- Table Saw: 93 dB
- Bulldozer: 100 dB
- Generator: 116 dB
- Oxygen Torch: 121 dB
- Jackhammer: 130 dB

The unit of measure for noise is the decibel (dB). A gentle stream measures about 50 dB; a quiet library at 40 dB and normal conversation at 60 dB. But noise that exceeds 80 dB begins to cause concerns about long-term exposure. At 85 dB, workers should protect themselves from hearing loss caused by noise.

OSHA regulation 29CFR 1910.95:

In workplaces with employee eight hour time-weighted average noise exposures of 85 dB and above, employers must protect their workers with an effective, on-going Hearing Conservation Program (HCP). This program:

- Helps increase output
- Reduces the number of accidents
- Improves employee retention and morale
- Helps employers meet federal rules while also protecting their workers

Creating Effective Programs

Noise Monitoring

You must have effective noise monitoring in areas where employees have an exposure of 85 dB and above. The monitoring will record the actual

workplace exposure of workers and determine need for the program. You may ask for our help with conducting noise monitoring at your workplace.

Audiometric Testing

Each employee with work-related exposure to noise greater than 85 dB must have an audiometric (hearing) test within 6 months of their first exposure on the job. These tests must be performed by licensed or certified audiologists (hearing specialists), otolaryngologists (ear, nose and throat doctors), physicians or technicians. The test must be repeated once a year. Use the OSHA 300 log to record work-related hearing loss.

Hearing Protection

You must offer hearing protection to all workers exposed to 85 dB or greater and encourage them to use it. Workers with a 90 dB exposure must wear the protection in the noisy areas. All exposures are based on eight-hour time-weighted average work periods. You should offer a range of types of hearing protection for employee use and have the proper Noise Reduction Rating (NRR) needed.

Training

All employees covered by the HCP program must have yearly training. When programs don't work well, it's often due to poor training and education of workers.

At a minimum, the training should address:

- the effects of noise on hearing, and
- the purpose of hearing protection, including selection, care and fit, and the purpose of audiometric testing and test procedures

Do you have questions about the Hearing Conservation Program?

Call NYS On-Site Consultation at (518) 457-2238
Email onsite@labor.ny.gov

We have consulting services at no cost for employers with safety and health concerns.