



# Hearing Conservation!

Arkansas Workers' Compensation Commission/ Health and  
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In every worksite there is some level of noise. Whether it be the monotonous hum of the mainframe or the incessant clatter of heavy industrial machinery, repeated exposure to noise levels above 85 dBA may lead to noise-induced hearing loss. Noise, or undesired sound, is one of the most widespread occupational health problems.

Hearing loss can occur as a result of exposure to noise, both loud and soft, and can affect hearing temporarily or can result in permanent hearing damage. Hearing loss that is temporary, which results from short-term exposures to noise, will diminish after a period of rest. However, permanent hearing loss can result due to long-term exposure to noise, with normal hearing to be impaired indefinitely.

In order to prevent hearing loss, hearing protectors must be made available to all workers exposed to noise levels over the permissible limit. Hearing protectors must adequately reduce the severity of the noise level for each employee's work environment. The protectors should be comfortable to wear and offer a sufficient decrease in noise levels to prevent hearing loss. Thus, employees shall be given the opportunity to select their hearing protectors from a variety of suitable hearing protectors provided by the employer. The employer shall also provide training in the use and care of all hearing protectors provided to employees.

The first step in controlling noise levels is to identify the sources of noise in our worksite. Each of us can think of at least one source of noise that will affect our hearing. Once the sources have been identified, we can determine what interventions can be utilized to reduce the risk of noise-induced hearing loss. There are a number of hearing protectors to choose from. Each of the protectors are beneficial in reducing the level of noise, and are designed to meet the needs of all degrees of noise. Therefore, we must take the initiative to determine which protector best suits the needs of this worksite.

According to OSHA regulations, engineering controls must first be attempted to decrease the noise levels. If the engineering controls are not able to be utilized in the work environment, other precautions will have to be made. There are many times when both engineering controls and hearing protection must be implemented to ensure the proper protection against noise-induced hearing loss.

The employer must also reevaluate the suitability of the employee's present protector whenever there is a change in working conditions that may cause the hearing protector being used to be inadequate. The noise measurement records of audiometric tests must be maintained for the duration of employment of the affected employee. These last two requirements are necessary for effective recordkeeping of Hearing Conservation programs in any worksite.

Because our hearing is so important, we must recognize the hazards in our worksite which will affect our listening skills. Creating an awareness among all of the employees will decrease the likelihood of any type of hearing loss. Intervention strategies can then be implemented to reduce noise levels and to reduce hearing loss to our employees.