The Importance of Hearing Conservation

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An element critical to workplace safety for many employers is a comprehensive hearing conservation program.

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Program Fundamentals

The purpose of a hearing conservation program is to establish guidelines for the prevention of occupational noise-induced hearing loss. All employees play an important role in the implementation and success of a hearing conservation program.

Plant Manager/Owner

- Appoint a facility Hearing Conservation Coordinator.
- Ensure that an initial evaluation is performed.
- Ensure that a site hearing conservation program is fully implemented and enforced.
- Ensure and support ongoing program maintenance and evaluation.
- Authorize control measures as necessary.

Hearing Conservation Coordinator

- Develop a written site-specific hearing conservation program.
- Assist organization and line management in implementation.
- Coordinate evaluations and monitoring with production schedules.
- Conduct evaluations and monitoring as appropriate.
- Issue hearing protection where appropriate.
- Post a copy of the standard.

Line Management

- Enforce use of noise control measures and hearing protection.
- Notify the facility Hearing Conservation Coordinator and Plant Manager/Owner of any changes that may affect employee noise exposure.
- Ensure an adequate supply of hearing protection is available for employees.

Employees

- Notify line management of any problems with control measures.
- Comply with the use of hearing protection as required.
- Wear, maintain and care for hearing protectors as instructed.
- Notify line management of any changes that may affect employee noise exposure.

Noise Assessment and Monitoring

The following noise limits, measured in decibels (dB), are a guideline for most facilities:

Shift Time	Action Level	Permissible Level
8 hours	85	90
10 hours	83	88
12 hours	82	87

Noise Assessments

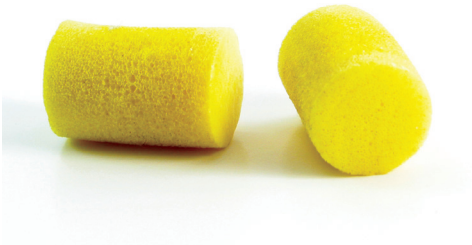
- Noise assessments shall be conducted whenever information exists that would indicate that employee exposures may be over the action level.
- The potential for noise exposure shall also be evaluated in the planning, design and layout phases of all building modifications or newly constructed facilities.
- Noise assessments shall be coordinated by the Hearing Conservation Coordinator.

Noise Monitoring

- Noise monitoring shall be conducted annually or when process or equipment changes may affect noise levels.
- Noise monitoring shall be performed by a qualified person.

Noise Control

Engineering controls, administrative controls and/or personal protective equipment should be utilized to reduce noise levels within the limits of the program.



When high noise levels are found:

- Contact the appropriate department to determine if the noise levels can be reduced by equipment maintenance.
- Evaluate the feasibility of administrative controls.
- Management and supervision are responsible for determining the applicable administrative control for a given operation.
- Evaluate the need for hearing protection.

Hearing protection

- Hearing protection should be selected on the basis of attenuation, comfort and fit.
- Protection should be evaluated and must attenuate to less than or equal to the action level.
- Clearly communicate the type of hearing protection offered at your facility.

Hearing protection is required to be used in the following conditions and areas:

- Employees exposed to greater than or equal to the permissible level.
- Employees exposed to greater than or equal to the action level and who have a confirmed standard threshold shift (STS).
- Employees who have not received a baseline audiogram and have been working in a hearing conservation designated area (action level or above) for a period of time exceeding six months. Once a baseline is obtained, use of hearing protection in areas below the permissible level is no longer mandatory, except as stated above.

Audiometric Testing

The following should be used in identifying audiometric testing participants:

- All employees required to participate in the Hearing Conservation Program must participate in annual audiometric testing.
- New or reassigned employees with potential exposure at or above the action level must be given an audiometric test as soon as possible, but no later than six months after hire or reassignment.
- New or reassigned employees with potential exposure at or above the action level must be given an audiometric test as soon as possible, but no later than one year after hire or reassignment.

Guidelines for Audiometric Testing

- All testing shall be preceded by at least 14 hours without workplace noise exposure. (If working on the test day, employees must wear hearing protection prior to the testing session.)
- Employees must be notified of testing results within 21 days of testing.
- Follow-up audiometric testing shall be conducted within 30 days of the receipt of test results for those individuals participating in the Hearing Conservation Program.
- Individuals identified by the audiogram as having an STS will also require 30-day follow-up testing.
- An explanation of the STS condition and hearing protection retraining and fitting must be given to employees whose follow-up testing confirms the presence of an STS.

Training

Training of affected employees must be accomplished by a training session conducted by an approved instructor. An annual review and retraining will be required.

Contents of training shall include:

- The anatomy of the ear and the effects of noise exposure on hearing
- Explanation and purpose of audiometric testing and how often testing will occur
- Purpose, availability and replacement of hearing protectors
- Proper selection, use, fit and care of hearing protectors
- Identification of the facility hearing conservation areas and/or tasks

OSHA Recordkeeping Requirements

Instances in which an employee has experienced a work-related STS in hearing in one or both ears, and the employee's total hearing level is 25 decibels or more above audiometric zero (averaged at 2000, 3000 and 4000 Hz) in the same ear or ears as the STS, will be recorded in the OSHA 300 Log, the Log of Work-Related Injuries and Illnesses.

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Records shall be maintained for the following time frames:

- Employee exposure records: duration of employment + 30 years
- Audiometric test records: duration of employment + 30 years (These are medical records and must be kept secured and confidential.)
- Training documentation: duration of employment
- Noise assessment and monitoring data: 30 years
- Acoustic and exhaustive calibration of audiometers with audiometric testing records: duration of employee's employment + 30 years.
- Date of the last acoustic and exhaustive calibration of the audiometer should be included in the information that you obtain from the testing service. All other calibration data will be maintained by the testing service.
- Records of the evaluation: minimum of two years.