

Safety Matters

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Hearing Conservation

According to OSHA, noise, or unwanted sound, is one of the most pervasive occupational health problems. Exposure to high levels of noise can cause hearing loss and other harmful health effects. The extent of damage depends primarily on the intensity of the noise and duration of exposure. Temporary hearing loss results from short-term exposure to noise, with normal hearing returning after a period of rest. Generally, prolonged exposure to high noise levels over a period of time gradually causes permanent hearing damage. OSHA's hearing conservation program is designed to protect workers with significant occupational noise exposures from hearing impairment.

Monitoring Noise Levels

The hearing conservation program requires employers to monitor noise exposure levels over 85 decibels (dB) in an eight hour period.



Employer Requirements

Employees must wear hearing protection when:

1. Exposure to noise levels of 85 dB or above for a period exceeding six months.
2. An employee has not received an Audiogram Hearing Test. Employers must make an OSHA certified Audiogram Hearing Test available at no cost to all employees.
3. Employees are exposed to noise greater than the permissible limit of 90 dB over an eight hour period.



Proper Protection

Employers must provide employees with a selection of at least one variety of hearing plug and one variety of hearing muffs. The protection selected should be comfortable to wear and offer a sufficient defense to prevent hearing loss. Hearing protection must adequately reduce the noise level for each employee's work environment. Most employers use the Noise Reduction Rating (NRR) that represents the type of protection's ability to reduce noise under ideal laboratory conditions. The employer will need to adjust the NRR to reflect noise reduction in the actual working environment.

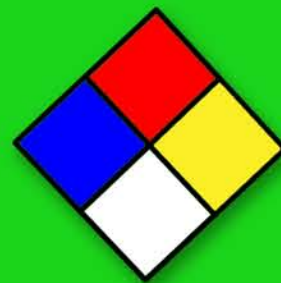
OSHA PERMISSIBLE NOISE EXPOSURES

Hours Per Day	Sound Level in dB
8 hours	90 dB
6 hours	92 dB
4 hours	95 dB
3 hours	97 dB
2 hours	100 dB
1.5 hours	102 dB
1 hour	105 dB
30 minutes	110 dB
15 minutes	115 dB



Employee Training

Employees must be trained, at least annually, on the effects of noise, hearing protection, the advantages and disadvantages of various hearing protection devices, and audiometric testing procedures.



Remember... Safety Matters.