

HEARING CONSERVATION

Can you hear as well as you used to? Many workers complain they cannot, and statistics show that they are right. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), noise-induced hearing loss is one of the most common occupational diseases, and is the second-most self-reported occupational illness or injury. Many workers are often exposed to noises loud enough to cause permanent hearing loss. Hearing loss is irreversible, but 100 percent preventable.

Keep Safety in Mind

To protect yourself in the workplace, you need to be aware of the noise levels that can promote hearing loss and to take steps to avoid or reduce them.

Here are the top five things you need to know about hearing conservation:

1. Noise monitoring

Permanent hearing loss can occur when the ear is exposed 85 decibels or higher averaged over an 8-hour work day. Noise monitoring is required in order to know what exposures your employees are exposed to.

2. Audiometric testing

Annual audiometric testing must be completed for employees who is exposed to the action level of 85 decibels 8-hour time-weighted average.

3. Hearing conservation

Per OSHA regulation 1910.95, employers must administer a hearing conservation program whenever employee noise exposures equal or exceed the action level of 85 decibels 8-hour time-weighted average.

4. Controls - Engineering

Engineering controls can include equipment substitution or use of sound absorption/insulation materials. Administrative controls could include rotating employees to reduce the time each person is exposed to the noise.

5. Controls - PPE

Using PPE will reduce the decibels the employee is exposed to. Examples of PPE include:

- Earplugs – Highest reduction
- Earmuffs – Air tight seal.
- Canal caps – Use pressure to hold in place.

Discussion

1. What areas in your work areas are noisy enough to warrant noise monitoring?

2. Can anyone share an experience relating to this topic?

