

SPECIAL POINTS  
OF INTEREST:

- General Hazards
- Identifying Hazards
- Safety Procedures
- Hearing Loss Symptoms
- Protection Against Hazards
- Hearing Protectors
- OSHA Regulations

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# Hats ON for Safety

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 12

MARCH 2007

## Say What?? Huh?

Our ears process sounds so they get to the brain and we hear them. They also allow us to distinguish the sounds so that we can tell a shout from a whisper, music from machinery, the voice of a friend from the voice of a stranger. Your ears also process noise, but they don't like it much. Noise above certain levels can damage parts of the ear so that you stop hearing some kinds or levels of sound. You probably won't be aware of it at first, but hearing loss caused by noise is a serious risk and a permanent one.

Many work areas in many companies have dangerously high noise levels. It is

estimated that over 16 million Americans are exposed to high noise levels at work. Your hearing is too delicate and too important to risk.



### General Hazards

The main hazard of noise is loss of hearing, which can be either partial or total, and is usually permanent. This is very serious and not the only problem caused by too much noise. Noise can:

- ▶ Cause you not to hear important safety warnings at work.
- ▶ Exhaust you from the strain of trying to listen or talk over loud noise.

### Safety Procedures

- Wear ear protection when needed and maintain equipment to reduce its noise levels.
- Keep ear protectors

clean, wash them regularly

- Wash hands thoroughly before inserting earplugs.
- Make sure the canal plugs fit snugly

- ▶ Create stress that affects you physically and mentally.

### Identifying Hazards

Special equipment measures noise. It looks for noise levels over an eight-hour workday, of 85 decibels or more. That's the level at which a hearing conservation is required. A decibel is the measurement of loudness, and exposure of 90 decibels over an eight hour workday can mean a risk of hearing loss. Some examples:

- Whisper—10 decibels
- Quiet house—30 decibels
- Street sounds—70 decibels
- Sander—85 decibels
- Pneumatic drill—100 dec.
- Car horn—120 decibels



- Make sure that earmuff caps fit snugly.
- Inspect your ear protectors before putting them on.
- DON'T use homemade protectors.

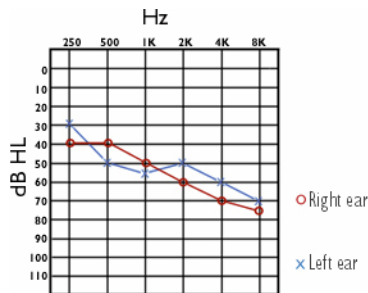
## Hearing Loss Symptoms

If you accept that you are spending at least some of your time in areas with loud noise, how do you know if it's hurting your hearing?

### Here are some signs:

- Noise or ringing in your ears
- Trouble hearing people when they speak
- Trouble hearing certain high or soft sounds
- Needing a higher volume on the TV or radio—high enough that other people complain.

If you have any of these problems, you should have your hearing tested.



## OSHA Regulations

OSHA has a very detailed noise and hearing conservation regulation (29CFR 1910.95). Basically, it requires all companies where noise levels exceed a certain level to provide protection. That includes;

- Monitoring individual and work area noise levels
- Testing employee hearing, with annual follow ups
- Providing hearing protectors where needed
- Providing training in the selection and use of hearing protectors.



What are \*YOU\* worried about? Help us out by letting us know about safety topics that could help keep your workplace safe!

## Protection Against Hazards

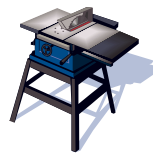
Some ways noise can be reduced in a work area are:

- Separating noisy machinery or operations.
- Keeping equipment maintained and lubricated.
- Replacing worn or loose machine parts.
- Using quiet substances like wood or plastic instead of metal when possible.
- Using rubber mountings under heavy machinery to reduce vibration
- Using sound-absorbing acoustical tiles on the

floor, ceiling or walls.

- Considering noise levels before buying new equipment or installing new processes
- Trying to perform high-noise maintenance after hours.

Of course, some equipment, like saws and punch presses, will never be quiet no matter what we do. So other measures are necessary. OSHA requires that if noise levels are above 85 decibels, you may have to wear hearing protectors. Considering that the alternative may be losing your hearing, this is pretty hard to argue with.



*Some information in this newsletter was taken from ODL Newsletter 11/8/04 and [www.nidcd.nih.gov](http://www.nidcd.nih.gov)*

## Hearing Protectors

Hearing protectors have to reduce the noise



coming into your ears to at least 90 decibels. They fall into three categories:

1. **Earmuffs** usually provide the greatest amount of protection.
2. **Earplugs** seal the ear canal and keep noise from getting through to the ear's delicate parts.
3. **Canal caps** are soft pads on the ends of a headband, sort of like headphones. They have to fit snugly and seal the entrance to the ear canal.