

# Wellness @Work

Summer 2014

## Noise and Hearing Loss Prevention

Noise is not a new hazard. As early as the industrial revolution, companies found that too much noise exposure may cause a change in their employees' hearing such as a temporary hearing loss or ringing (*tinnitus*).

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) recommends removing hazardous noise from the workplace whenever possible and using hearing protectors in those situations where dangerous noise exposures are not controlled or eliminated.

OSHA recommends the implementation of hearing conservation programs to prevent initial occupational hearing loss, preserve and protect remaining hearing, and equip workers with the knowledge and hearing protection devices. These devices should protect them when noise exposure is equal to or greater than 85 dBA for an 8 hour exposure or in the construction industry when exposures exceed 90 dBA for an 8 hour exposure.

Key elements of an effective hearing loss prevention program (HLPP) include:

- ✓ Workplace noise sampling and monitoring to identify potential risks.
- ✓ Informing workers at risk including providing opportunity to observe noise sampling.
- ✓ Maintaining a worker audiometric testing program (hearing tests).
- ✓ Implementing comprehensive hearing protection follow-up procedures for workers who show a loss of hearing after completing baseline and yearly audiometric testing.
- ✓ Proper selection and fitting of hearing protection.
- ✓ Evaluation of hearing protectors to determine effectiveness for the specific workplace noise.
- ✓ Training and information to ensure workers are aware of hazards and how to properly use the protective equipment provided.
- ✓ Data management and



NIOSH

Research shows that implementing effective HLPPs produces numerous benefits in the workplace including:

- ✓ Reduced employee absenteeism.
- ✓ Reduction in workplace injuries.
- ✓ Lower workers compensation rates because of fewer claims.

Because occupational hearing loss can occur gradually, workers may not notice a change until relatively large changes in hearing sensitivity has occurred.

Audiometric evaluation of workers' hearing is crucial to the success of an HLPP because it is the only way to actually measure whether occupational hearing loss is being prevented.

An annual comparison of audiometric tests can trigger prompt interventions, initiating protective measures, and motivate employees to prevent further hearing loss.

### Audiometric Tests

MED-1 audiometric testing is conducted by occupational hearing conservationists certified by the Council for Accreditation in Occupational Hearing Conservation (CAOHC). They follow the training guidelines proposed by the National Hearing Conservation Association (NHCA).

Contact Tammie Milligan at 616.459.1570 or [tmilligan@med1services.com](mailto:tmilligan@med1services.com) to learn more about hearing loss prevention programs.

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## Can You Hear Me Now?

Every year, approximately 30 million people in the United States are occupationally exposed to hazardous noise. Thousands of workers suffer from preventable hearing loss each year due to high workplace noise levels.

Repeated exposures to loud noise can lead to permanent tinnitus and/or hearing loss.

Loud noise can also create physical and psychological stress, reduce productivity, interfere with communication and concentration, and contribute to workplace accidents and injuries by making it difficult to hear warning signals. Noise-induced hearing loss limits ability to hear high frequency sounds, understand speech, and seriously impairs communication.

### What can be done to reduce the hazard from noise?

Noise controls are the first line of defense against excessive noise exposure to reduce or eliminate the risk to hearing.

#### Engineering controls

involve modifying or replacing equipment, or making related physical changes at the source. Examples of inexpensive, effective engineering controls include:

- ✓ Choosing low-noise tools and machinery.
- ✓ Maintaining and lubricating machinery and equipment often.
- ✓ Placing a barrier between the noise source and employee (e.g., sound walls or curtains).
- ✓ Enclose or isolate the noise source.



### What are the warning signs your workplace may be too noisy?

- ✓ You hear ringing or humming in your ears when you leave work.
- ✓ You have to shout to be heard by a coworker at arm's length away.
- ✓ You experience temporary hearing loss when leaving work.

**Administrative controls** involve changes in the workplace to reduce or eliminate the worker exposure to noise such as:

- ✓ Operating noisy machines during shifts when fewer people are exposed.
- ✓ Limiting the amount of time a person spends at a noise source.
- ✓ Providing quiet areas where workers can get relief and recover from hazardous noise sources.
- ✓ Restricting worker presence to a suitable distance away from noisy equipment.

**Hearing protection devices (HPDs)**, such as earmuffs and plugs, are considered an acceptable but less desirable option to control exposures to noise and are generally used during the time necessary to implement engineering or administrative controls, when such controls are not feasible, or when worker's hearing tests indicate significant hearing damage.

## MED-1 Wellness Services

### Screenings

Height & Weight  
Body Mass Index (BMI)  
Body Composition  
Blood Pressure  
Cholesterol  
Diabetes  
Colo-rectal cancer  
PSA

### Specialized Programs

Health risk appraisals  
Immunizations  
Smoking cessation  
Customized worksite programs  
Drug free worksite  
Special exams

### Education

CPR/First Aid training  
AED programs  
Wellness coaching  
Health fairs  
Wellness education



Wellness at Work is a informational publication provided by

MED-1 Occupational Health System to facilitate health and wellness initiatives for employees.

For more information on any topics presented or to access additional copies of current or past issues, contact Tammie Milligan at 616.459.1570 or go to — [www.med1services.com](http://www.med1services.com).