

Toolbox Talks



HEARING PROTECTION



Noise is any sound that is unwanted. Many workers are overexposed to noise. How noise affects your hearing depends on the intensity of the sound, how long exposed, and how close you are to the source. In time, overexposure decreases our ability to hear.

Are You At Risk?

Scientific studies have shown that hearing loss can occur when the 8-hour average noise exposure exceeds 85 decibels. Short periods of very high noise can also cause overexposure. For example, working for only 15 minutes with a gas-powered chainsaw will lead to overexposure for that day. If you find yourself shouting to talk to someone who is just two to three feet away, the noise level is probably greater than 85 decibels.

Reduce Noise Levels

The best way to prevent hearing loss is reduce noise levels on site however this can be difficult.

- Stop the noise from reaching people. Move source away from people; Soundproof enclosures or add sound barriers.
- Replace noisy metal parts with plastic or rubber components.
- Eliminate vibration noise by placing heavy equipment on resilient pads.
- Maintain equipment with lubrication to reduce friction between rotating, sliding or moving parts.
- Reduce exposure time by breaking up or sharing tasks.
- Wear a clip-on dosimeter to measure noise exposure during a shift.

Use Hearing Protection

- Ensure hazardous noise areas have been identified and clean, proper hearing protection is used at all times when exposed.
- Know the noise reduction rating (NRR). The NRR is found on the PPE package.
- The type of hearing protection you wear depends on the noise levels. (Ex. Earmuffs or earplugs must be worn when using chainsaws, guns, lawn mowers, or power tools.)

Two Main Types of Hearing Protection

Earplugs

- Make sure hands are clean and dry. Dirt and moisture in your ear canal can cause infections.
- Wash reusable earplugs with soap and water daily. Store in a closed container. *Note:* Ensure earplugs are dry prior to storing.
- Always read the instructions supplied with earplugs. Some earplugs come in different sizes; ensure you choose the correct size.
- Plugs can become loose; remove plugs slowly so that the suction does not hurt your ear.

Earmuffs

- Earmuffs cover the whole ear. The headband should fit snugly against the top of your head. Never stretch the earmuff's headband.
- Replace worn cushions, bent headbands and flaking foam inserts.
- If earmuffs are damaged; pads flattened, cracked creating a poor seal, then get the damaged part replace or discard. Wipe earmuffs clean when necessary. Wash foam inserts and rubber cushions with soap and water.

Remember: Hearing loss is Painless, Progressive, Permanent, and Preventable!

