

MONTHLY SAFETY BLAST

HEARING CONSERVATION



One of the most prevalent occupational health concerns in the United States is also preventable! Approximately 30 million workers are exposed to hazardous noise that can lead to permanent hearing loss each year. In the agriculture, forestry, and fishing industries, there are many sources of hazardous noise including tractors, machinery, power tools, livestock, and engine rooms.

Although brief exposure to loud noise can cause temporary deafness or ringing in the ears, exposure to 120 decibels or more can cause immediate and permanent harm. Prolonged exposure to lower decibel levels, 85-110, can also result in permanent hearing impairment or tinnitus (ringing in the ears). Noise may be exceeding safe limits in your workplace if you hear ringing or humming in your ears when you leave work, you have to raise your voice to be heard by a coworker at an arm's length away, or you experience temporary hearing loss when you leave work.

To protect workers from noise, consider these engineering and administrative controls first:

- Choose low-noise tools and machinery
- Maintain and lubricate machinery and equipment
- Place a barrier between the noise source and the workers
- Enclose the noise source
- Operate noisy machines during shifts with fewer people
- Limit the amount of time workers spend near a noise source
- Provide quiet areas where workers can find relief from hazardous noise
- Increase the amount of space between the workers and the noise source

If the noise cannot be reduced below 85 decibels, hearing protection devices should be worn. Earmuffs, ear bands, and ear plugs are acceptable, inexpensive ways to protect your hearing.



Resources:

- For the smartphone users, try the deciBel app! This app will allow you to measure the decibels in your surroundings.
- OSHA Noise Exposure Website
<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/noisehearingconservation/>
- Protect Your Hearing, Kansas State University
<http://nasdonline.org/document/1178/d001014/protect-your-hearing.html>
- They're Your Ears-Protect Them. Hearing Loss Caused by Farm Noise is Preventable, NIOSH
<http://nasdonline.org/document/1976/d001885/short-title-they-039-re-your-ears-protect.html>
- Dangerous Decibels, Oregon Health & Science University
<http://www.dangerousdecibels.org/>
- Wise Ears, National Institutes of Health
<http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/wise/Pages/Default.aspx>

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