Hearing protection toolbox talk: noise at work

29 CFR 1926.52, 1910.95, 1926.101

Date _____ Trainer _____ Location _____

Opening question

Has anyone here left work with ringing ears or muffled hearing, and what were you doing that day?

Why it matters

Noise damage usually builds up slowly and does not hurt, so it is easy to miss until the damage is done. Hearing lost to noise does not come back, and hearing aids cannot make it like new. Noise can also leave you with ringing in your ears that never goes away. The good news is that this kind of hearing loss can be prevented.

Key points

1. **Know when noise is too loud**
   Rule of thumb: if you have to raise your voice to talk to someone an arm's length away, the noise is probably loud enough to hurt your hearing. Saws, grinders, jackhammers, compressors, generators and heavy equipment are common sources. Ringing or muffled hearing after a shift is a warning sign that your ears took a hit.

2. **Make it quieter first**
   When sound levels go over the limits in OSHA's noise tables, feasible engineering or administrative controls must be used first. If they do not bring the sound down far enough, hearing protection must be provided and used (29 CFR 1926.52(b) in construction, 29 CFR 1910.95(b)(1) in general industry). That can mean a quieter tool, a muffler, moving the generator farther away or less time near the noise.
   29 CFR 1926.52(b)

3. **Know the 85 decibel action level**
   In general industry, an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels is the action level, and at or above it the employer must run a hearing conservation program (29 CFR 1910.95(c)(1) and (c)(2)). At or above that level, hearing protectors must be made available at no cost and replaced as necessary (29 CFR 1910.95(i)(1)). In construction, a continuing, effective hearing conservation program is required wherever sound levels exceed the values in the noise table (29 CFR 1926.52(d)(1)).
   29 CFR 1910.95(c)(1)

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4 Wear protection the whole time

Earplugs and earmuffs both work when they fit well and stay on, so pick the type you will actually wear. In general industry, the employer must let you choose from a variety of suitable hearing protectors (29 CFR 1910.95(i)(3)). Keep them on the whole time you are in the noise, because even a few minutes without them adds up. In construction, plain cotton is not an acceptable protective device (29 CFR 1926.101(c)).

29 CFR 1910.95(i)(3)

5 Fit earplugs and earmuffs right

Roll foam plugs into a thin tube, reach over your head to pull the top of your ear up and back, then slide the plug in deep and hold it while it expands. Earmuffs need a full seal, so hair, hats and the arms of safety glasses under the cushions can let noise leak in. In construction, earplugs must be fitted or determined individually by competent persons (29 CFR 1926.101(b)). In general industry, the employer must ensure proper initial fitting and supervise correct use (29 CFR 1910.95(i)(5)).

29 CFR 1926.101(b)

6 Get tested and trained every year

In general industry, employers must make hearing tests available at no cost to workers exposed at or above an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels (29 CFR 1910.95(g)(1) and (g)(2)). After a baseline test, a new test is required at least once a year (29 CFR 1910.95(g)(6)). Those workers must also be trained every year on the effects of noise, hearing protectors and why the tests are done (29 CFR 1910.95(k)(1), (k)(2) and (k)(3)).

29 CFR 1910.95(g)(1)

Scenario

Picture this: Your crew is working next to a generator and an air compressor while a coworker grinds steel. A new helper keeps his earmuffs around his neck because he wants to hear the radio and the foreman. By lunch, his ears are ringing and everyone sounds like they are talking through a wall. What should he have done, and what can the crew change before the afternoon?

Crew discussion

1. Which tools or areas on this job make you raise your voice to be heard?
2. Which hearing protection do you like best, and what makes people take it off?
3. What could we change to make the work quieter?
4. Where do we keep spare earplugs, and who do you tell when they run out?

Bottom line **If you have to shout to be heard, fit your hearing protection right and keep it on until you are out of the noise.**

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Sign-in sheet / Hoja de asistencia

Topic / Tema Noise and hearing protection / Ruido y protección auditiva

Date / Fecha _____

Trainer / Instructor _____ Location / Lugar _____ Company / Empresa _____

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