



FACT SHEET

Hearing Conservation

Number: _____ Date: _____

Introduction

According to the National Institute of Safety and Health (NIOSH), 30 million Americans are exposed to hazardous noise levels at work, and this has resulted in permanent hearing loss for approximately 10 million workers. Short term exposure to high noise levels can result in acoustic trauma and, usually, just a temporary loss of hearing. Long term exposures to high noise levels can result in permanent hearing loss. If you have to raise your voice when speaking to someone within arms length, you are likely in a high noise area. If you have trouble hearing people speak in crowded rooms when others can, or if you often think people are mumbling, you probably have some hearing loss.

Regulatory Guidelines

OSHA has specific regulations pertaining to hearing conservation and noise exposure. 29 CFR 1910.95 outlines rules that employers are required to follow. Specifically, if an employee is exposed to 85 decibels or above for an 8-hour time-weighted average, then he/she must be enrolled in a hearing conservation program. This program consists of annual training and audiometric exams. If an employee is exposed to 90 decibels or above for an 8-hour time-weighted average, or the equivalent for a shorter time period, the employer must use engineering controls to mitigate this exposure. If these controls are insufficient, the employer must provide hearing protection devices.

Hearing protection devices consist of earplugs and earmuffs. Earmuffs are easy to put on and remove, and they provide extra protection for cold temperatures. Earplugs are as effective if they are worn properly, and they can be worn with glasses and helmets.

It is the employee's responsibility to notify his/her supervisor of concerns about a noisy workplace. Environmental Health and Safety can do monitoring of the area to evaluate the noise levels. It is also the employee's responsibility to wear hearing protection devices, when provided, to attend annual training, and to have annual audiograms, if required.