

## TOOLBOX TALK

# Noise & Hearing Protection

### WHY THIS MATTERS

22 million U.S. workers are exposed to hazardous noise each year (CDC/NIOSH). About 11,000 hearing injuries were reported in 2022 alone (OSHA). Noise-induced hearing loss is permanent — no surgery or hearing aid can fully restore it. But it is 100% preventable.

**22M**

U.S. workers exposed to hazardous noise (CDC)

**85 dB**

OSHA action level 8-hr exposure limit

**100%**

Noise-induced hearing loss is preventable

## 5 Rules to Protect Your Hearing

Once your hearing is gone, it's gone forever — protect it every day:

**1**

### KNOW YOUR NOISE LEVELS

If you must shout to be heard 3 feet away, noise exceeds 85 dB. Use a sound level meter to confirm.

**2**

### WEAR HEARING PROTECTION ABOVE 85 dB

Earplugs, earmuffs, or both. Must be properly fitted. Required in all posted hearing protection zones.

**3**

### REDUCE EXPOSURE TIME

At 85 dB, safe exposure is 8 hours. At 100 dB, it's only 15 minutes. Rotate workers out of high-noise tasks.

**4**

### USE ENGINEERING CONTROLS FIRST

Quieter equipment, barriers, enclosures, and vibration dampening. Eliminate noise at the source when possible.

**5**

### GET ANNUAL HEARING TESTS

Baseline audiogram required within 6 months of first exposure. Annual tests detect early loss before it's too late.

## Noise Hazard Checklist

- Have noise levels been measured in all work areas?
- Are hearing protection zones posted and enforced?
- Do all workers have properly fitted hearing protection?
- Are workers in a hearing conservation program if exposed above 85 dB?
- Have all exposed workers received baseline and annual audiograms?

## Common Noise Levels on Construction Sites

**Normal talk: 60 dB**

Safe. No hearing protection needed. This is your baseline for comparison.

**Power drill: 90 dB**

Limit exposure to 8 hrs. Hearing protection recommended. Damage begins here.

**Circular saw: 100 dB**

Only 15 minutes safe exposure! Hearing protection mandatory. Double protection recommended.

**Jackhammer: 110 dB**

Only 2 minutes safe exposure! Double protection required (plugs + muffs).

**Pile driver: 120 dB**

Pain threshold. Immediate hearing damage. Maximum protection essential.

**Gunshot/Explosion: 140 dB**

Instant permanent damage. Even brief exposure destroys hearing cells permanently.

### Common Mistakes That Cause Hearing Loss

- ✗ "I'm used to the noise" — that's not adaptation, that's hearing damage already happening
- ✗ Wearing earplugs loosely or incorrectly — improperly fitted plugs provide almost no protection
- ✗ Removing hearing protection "just for a minute" — damage accumulates with every unprotected exposure
- ✗ Not wearing protection for "quiet" power tools — many tools exceed 85 dB without sounding loud
- ✗ Skipping annual hearing tests — you won't notice gradual loss until it's severe and permanent

### Safety Tips to Remember

- ✓ If you have to shout — you need hearing protection. It's that simple
- ✓ Earplugs must be inserted correctly — roll, pull, hold for 20 seconds until they expand fully
- ✓ Double up in extreme noise — earplugs AND earmuffs together for jackhammers and pile drivers
- ✓ Give your ears rest periods — even short breaks from noise help prevent cumulative damage
- ✓ Hearing loss is invisible and painless — that's what makes it so dangerous. Protect now or regret forever

## Discussion Questions for Your Team

1. What are the loudest tasks or equipment on our site right now?
2. Does everyone have hearing protection that fits properly?
3. Are hearing protection zones clearly posted?
4. When was your last hearing test (audiogram)?
5. What would you do if you noticed ringing in your ears after work?

### TOOLBOX TALK SIGN-OFF

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Project: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_