

# Hearing Conservation

### WHY THIS MATTERS

About 22 million U.S. workers are exposed to hazardous noise each year (CDC/NIOSH). Occupational hearing loss is permanent — it cannot be corrected by surgery or medicine. 53% of noise-exposed workers report not wearing hearing protection.

**22M**

Workers exposed to hazardous noise yearly (CDC)

**85 dB**

OSHA action level for hearing programs

**53%**

Noise-exposed workers not wearing HPDs (NIOSH)

## 5 Rules for Hearing Conservation

Every worker exposed to noise at or above 85 dB must follow these rules:

**1**

### WEAR HEARING PROTECTION

Use earplugs, earmuffs, or both in all areas where noise exceeds 85 dB. If you must shout to be heard 3 feet away, hearing protection is required.

**2**

### KNOW YOUR NOISE LEVELS

Learn the noise levels of equipment you use. A chainsaw produces ~110 dB, jackhammer ~100 dB, grinder ~95 dB. The louder the noise, the less time you can be exposed.

**3**

### INSERT EARPLUGS CORRECTLY

Roll foam earplugs into a tight cylinder, pull ear up and back, insert and hold 30 seconds until fully expanded. Incorrect insertion can reduce protection by 50% or more.

**4**

### GET YOUR HEARING TESTED

OSHA requires annual audiograms for workers exposed at or above 85 dB. A baseline test must be done within 6 months of first exposure. Report any changes immediately.

**5**

### REDUCE NOISE AT THE SOURCE

Use quieter tools, maintain equipment (lubricate, replace worn parts), install barriers or enclosures, and rotate workers to limit exposure time.

## Before You Start — Quick Checklist

- Are noise levels in your work area above 85 dB?
- Is the correct hearing protection available for the task?
- Are your earplugs properly fitted and fully inserted?
- Are earmuffs in good condition with intact seals?
- Is your annual audiogram up to date?
- Have you been trained on proper HPD use and care?

## Know Your Noise — Common Workplace Levels

**Normal talk:** 60-65 dB — safe for unlimited exposure. This is your reference baseline level.

**Power drill:** ~95 dB — OSHA allows only 4 hours of unprotected exposure per day at this level.

**Grinder:** ~95-100 dB — hearing protection required. At 100 dB, only 2 hours of exposure allowed.

**Chainsaw:** ~110 dB — OSHA allows only 30 minutes of unprotected exposure. Double protection recommended.

**Jackhammer:** ~100 dB — 2 hours max exposure. Always use earplugs AND earmuffs for extended use.

**Pile driver:** ~115+ dB — max 15 minutes unprotected. Immediate hearing damage can occur at this level.

### Common Mistakes That Cause Hearing Loss

- ✗ Not wearing hearing protection 'because it's only for a few minutes' — damage is cumulative
- ✗ Inserting earplugs incorrectly — a poor seal can reduce protection by over 50%
- ✗ Removing hearing protection to talk — step away from the noise source instead
- ✗ Using damaged or dirty earplugs/earmuffs — worn cushions and hardened plugs don't protect
- ✗ Ignoring early signs: ringing ears, muffled hearing after work, having to shout to communicate

### Safety Tips to Remember

- ✓ The 3-foot rule: if you must shout to be heard 3 feet away, you need hearing protection now
- ✓ Carry earplugs at all times on site — noise hazards can appear without warning
- ✓ Clean reusable earplugs daily and replace disposable plugs after each use
- ✓ Double up — use earplugs AND earmuffs together when noise exceeds 100 dB
- ✓ Hearing loss is painless and gradual — by the time you notice it, permanent damage is done

## Discussion Questions for Your Team

1. What are the loudest noise sources in our current work area?
2. Is everyone wearing the correct hearing protection for their task?
3. Does anyone experience ringing in their ears after work?
4. When was your last hearing test (audiogram)?
5. Do we have quiet areas available for ear rest breaks?

### TOOLBOX TALK SIGN-OFF

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

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

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

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

Attendance sheet attached: [ ] Yes