Hearing Conservation

Noise-induced hearing loss is the most common job-related illness in the workplace, and it is among the most avoidable. Hearing loss develops over a long period of time, and except in very rare cases, there are no visible effects and no pain. In its early stages it affects the ability to understand or discriminate speech and eventually may lead to progressive loss of communication, socialization, and responsiveness to the environment and even affect the ability to hear sounds in general.

There are several steps that can be taken to ensure the hearing of workers:

To avoid hearing loss incidents, the noise level that the employee(s) will be exposed to the Time-Weighted Average Sound Level (TWA) must be determined.

The second step is to formulate a hearing loss protection program and evaluate each employee’s baseline hearing levels using an audiometer and a professional trained in hearing tests who will in addition make a correction for age-related hearing loss. If the noise exposure is equivalent to or greater than a noise exposure received in 8 hours where the noise level is constantly 85 dB or above, the employers must make audiometric testing available at no cost to all employees who may be exposed to continuous, intermittent, and impulsive noise within an 80 dB to 130 dB range. Threshold hearing levels should be reviewed at determined amounts of time to test the audiometric shift in the workers hearing and monitored whenever changes in production, process, or controls increase noise exposure.

Employers must educate employees on the reasons for the hearing conservation programs and the need to protect their hearing so that they will be motivated to wear protection and take audiometric tests. They must issue a selection of at least one variety of hearing plug and one variety of hearing muffs. All employees running the risk of hearing loss, must be fitted with and required to wear hearing protectors that are comfortable and suitable for the working environment whenever they may be exposed to noise levels above a TWA for any period of time exceeding 6 months after their first exposure and until the baseline audiogram is conducted.

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