

Safety Matters

Preventing Hearing Loss

Can you hear as well as you used to? Many workers complain they cannot, and statistics show that they are right. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), noise-induced hearing loss is one of the most common occupational diseases, and is the second-most self-reported occupational illness or injury. Many workers are often exposed to noises loud enough to cause permanent hearing loss. It can happen slowly over time, so it may not even be noticeable.

The time to be concerned about hearing loss is before it starts. Hearing loss is permanent. The good news is that hearing loss is preventable with the right protection.

The Facts

To protect yourself in the workplace, you need to be aware of the noise levels that can promote hearing loss and to take steps to avoid or reduce them as follows.

- According to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), workplace noise is likely to be hazardous if:
 - You have to raise your voice to talk to someone who is an arm's length away.
 - After leaving a noisy place, your ears are ringing or sounds seem dull.
- Experts recommend wearing ear protection when regularly exposed to 85 decibels of noise. For comparison's sake, this is less than the noise output from average traffic, most power tools, a shotgun blast or rock concerts.
- Be sure to wear hearing loss protective equipment consistently.

If you suffer from hearing loss, you may become more isolated at work because you will have trouble hearing and communicating with others. This can put you at a higher risk of accidents and injuries. If you are not able to hear warning signals or shout-outs from your co-workers, you may not be as aware of hazards or danger as you need to be.

It is up to you to protect your hearing on the job by participating in personal protective equipment (PPE) training and complying with our hearing loss prevention program by wearing your hearing protection, as required.

Types of Hearing Protection

The louder the noise, the shorter the exposure time needed before hearing protection is required. From earmuffs to simple plugs, there are a variety of sizes and styles to choose from, based on your personal preferences and comfort level. Some of the most common types include:

- Single-use ear plugs, which are self-forming and, when properly inserted, work as well as most molded earplugs.
- Pre-formed or molded earplugs, which are individually fitted by a professional, can be disposable or reusable. Reusable plugs should be cleaned after each use.
- Earmuffs, which are ideal because they form a perfect seal around the ear. Be aware that glasses, facial hair, long hair or facial movements, such as chewing, may reduce the protective value of earmuffs.

Hearing loss can be debilitating and is irreversible. Taking precautions in the workplace today will help to protect you against hearing loss tomorrow.