



ABOUT PREVENTING HEARING LOSS

LENGTH: 11 MINUTES

PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:

Our workplace is full of hazards, hazards that can cause injury and disability. Controlling these hazards and preventing injuries is the point of our safety and health program. One such hazard is the one presented by high levels of harmful noise. Controlling our exposure to high levels of noise can prevent the life-changing effects of hearing loss. That is the point of our hearing loss prevention program and that is the point of this program.

Topics include how the components of the ear process sound, permissible exposure limits, use of disposable and reusable ear plugs, advantages and disadvantages of ear muffs, audiometric testing and the importance of protecting our hearing.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

After watching the program, the participant will be able to explain the following:

- How the components of the ear process sound;
- How to properly insert disposable ear plugs;
- What the advantages and disadvantages of ear muffs are;
- How the company's audiometric hearing program works;
- Why it is so important that we protect our hearing.

INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT:

BACKGROUND

- Power tools, lawn equipment, metal working machinery, air compressors and countless other pieces of machinery or tools generate noise at levels high enough to damage our hearing. Once damaged, our hearing cannot be repaired. Hearing loss can have a devastating impact on our quality of life and the quality of life for our loved ones.
- To prevent hearing loss our organization has developed a "Hearing Conservation Program" as required by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, OSHA, in their standard 1910.95 titled "Occupational Noise Exposure". For our hearing conservation program to be effective, all employees must understand how excessive noise can damage our hearing and the actions that must be taken to prevent hearing loss.

HOW THE COMPONENTS OF THE EAR PROCESS SOUNDS

- Our ability to hear depends on many delicate processes working correctly. Sound travels in waves and upon reaching our outer ear is channeled into our ear canal. Inside the ear canal, these sound waves strike the ear drum, which is covered with a delicate membrane. The membrane of the eardrum vibrates against three delicate bones which carry the vibrations to the inner ear and to a structure called the cochlea. The cochlea is filled with fluid and contains tiny hair-like structures called cilia.
- When the vibrations reach the cochlea, its fluid is set into motion. The cilia sway and bend as they are contacted by these waves of fluid. As they move, the cilia transmit signals to the brain which interprets these signals into the sounds we hear.
- The weak point in this delicate process is the cilia. When noise levels become harmful, the fluid waves inside the cochlea become so powerful that the cilia can be damaged. When cilia are damaged, hearing loss will occur. Damaged cilia do not repair themselves, and we cannot grow more. When our cilia are damaged, any resulting hearing loss is permanent.

PERMISSIBLE EXPOSURE LIMITS

- Remember the point of the hearing conservation program is to prevent this type of damaging hearing loss by preventing exposure to harmful noise. Our hearing conservation program limits employee noise exposure to the permissible levels listed in OSHA's Noise Exposure Standard. These permissible exposure levels are a combination of decibels and time of exposure.
- For example, for an 8 hour exposure, the maximum permissible sound level is 90 decibels. For a shorter exposure of 3 hours, a higher sound level of 97 decibels is allowed.
- Our facility conducts noise testing to periodically measure the level of noise to which workers are exposed. In those areas where noise exposure is found to exceed permissible limits, steps will be taken to reduce exposure.
- If possible, engineering or administrative controls will be used to reduce noise exposure. If this is not possible, employees will be required to use hearing protection.
- The purpose of this hearing protection is to reduce employee noise exposure to permissible levels.

NOISE REDUCTION LEVELS

- There are various types of hearing protection devices and each has a noise reduction rating. The noise reduction rating is a measure, in decibels, of how much the device reduces the level of outside noise before it reaches the inner ear.
- Hearing protection devices with higher noise reduction ratings offer more protection than those with lower ratings.
- If you are required to wear hearing protection, it will be provided to you by the company and you will be instructed how to use it properly.

EAR PLUGS

- One of the most common types of hearing protection is the ear plug.
- One advantage of ear plugs is that they are available in different sizes and can be disposable or reusable. Some ear plugs are designed to be inserted into the ear canal, while others only cover the entrance to the ear canal. This type of ear plug is called a canal cap.
- Most disposable ear plugs are made of polyurethane or other expandable foam, which is easily compressed for insertion into the ear.
- The most important thing to know about ear plugs is that they must be installed properly to achieve their full noise reduction rating. Improperly installed ear plugs offer very little protection.
- To properly install this type of disposable ear plug, first make sure your hands are clean. One disadvantage of ear plugs is that handling with unclean hands can allow dirt, germs and other foreign matter to enter our ear canal.
- Once your hands are clean, compress the ear plug by rolling it in your fingers. With your other hand, pull up on the top of the ear. This helps to open the entrance to the ear canal so the plug can be inserted.
- Insert the plug into the ear canal and hold it in place with the tip of your finger while the ear plug expands. The ear plug will expand to conform to the shape of your ear canal.
- Reusable ear plugs do not require compression. This type of ear plug is usually made of silicone, rubber or plastic. They must also be inserted properly into the ear canal to achieve maximum noise reduction.
- Reusable ear plugs should be cleaned with soap and warm water on a regular basis and stored in a clean, dry container when not in use.
- Ear plugs come in many shapes and sizes, so be sure you find one that fits properly and comfortably. Ask for help if you are unsure about the fit, comfort or proper installation of your ear plugs.

EAR MUFFS

- Ear muffs are also a popular choice when it comes to hearing protection.
- Ear muffs are designed to cover the entire ear and consist of a pair of cups connected by a headband. These cups are usually filled with soft foam to provide a comfortable, secure fit and low pressure seal.
- Some advantages of ear muffs are that one size fits all, they are easy to put on and take off, and it is easy to visually verify they are being worn by employees. Also, with proper cleaning, ear muffs may be shared with other employees.
- Some disadvantages to earmuffs are some employees may find the tight fit uncomfortable, they may cause sweating in hot environments and they may interfere with other protective equipment.
- In extremely loud environments it may be necessary to wear both ear plugs and ear muffs to achieve the noise reduction required to reduce exposure to permissible levels.

AUDIOMETRIC TESTING

- Our hearing conservation program includes audiometric testing. Audiometric testing is a program of hearing tests and evaluations by hearing professionals. These tests provide an initial hearing baseline for each employee so subsequent testing can reveal any indications of hearing loss.
- Employees enrolled in the hearing conservation program will have their hearing tested once a year. An employee's initial test, known as a baseline audiogram, will establish a baseline to which future tests can be compared.
- If subsequent tests show hearing loss of at least 10 decibels as compared to the baseline audiogram, the employee has suffered some hearing loss. Hearing loss of 10 decibels is referred to as a "Standard Threshold Shift."
- When an employee's hearing test indicates that hearing loss has occurred, the employee's exposure to noise will be re-evaluated. This may include retraining the employee to ensure hearing protection is being used properly or introducing administrative controls to reduce the amount of time the employee is exposed to high noise levels.

IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTING OUR HEARING

- All workers should be on the lookout for any symptoms of hearing loss so preventive measures can be taken.
- People with hearing loss can often hear but not understand what others are saying, especially in the presence of background noise or other conversations.
- If you suspect you are experiencing hearing loss, you must be extra vigilant to protect what hearing you have left.
- In addition to protecting our hearing at work, it's equally important to protect our hearing off the job. After all, harmful noise is damaging no matter where it occurs.
- Hearing loss can be gradual, happening over a long period of time. We often don't recognize it's happening until substantial hearing loss has occurred.
- Hearing loss can be prevented by participating in our hearing conservation program, properly wearing hearing protection when required, and taking steps to reduce off-job noise exposure.