



Quick Guide to Hearing Conservation

Occupational Noise Exposure Standard

The Occupational Health and Safety Administration's (OSHA) Occupational Noise Exposure Standard (i.e. hearing conservation standard) requires employers to:

- x Measure workplace noise levels for individuals and areas;
- x Provide free hearing protection to employees when they are exposed to certain levels of noise;
- x Provide free, annual hearing exams when employees are exposed to certain levels of noise;
- x Provide training to employees on hearing conservation; and,
- x Keep records of noise assessments, hearing exam results, training, etc.

Noise Exposure Health Effects

Noise-induced hearing loss is 100% preventable, but when a person's exposure is not reduced or properly protected against, noise can cause permanent hearing loss. Hearing aids and surgery cannot correct the damage done to the ear by loud noise.

- If you are in a space and have to raise your voice when speaking to someone within arm's length, you are likely in a high-noise area.

OSHA Noise Exposure Levels

- An employee may be exposed to noise up to 90 decibels over an 8-hour time weighted average.
 - o This is called the permissible exposure limit (PEL).
 - o Employees MUST wear hearing protection at or above this level.
- An employee must be enrolled in a hearing conservation program when exposed at or above 85 decibels.
 - o Hearing protection must be provided by the employer at this level.
 - o This proactively prevents employees from being exposed to noise levels above the PEL without proper hearing protection and allows the employee to be monitored for hearing loss prior to being exposed above the PEL.

Noise Monitoring

- Those employees who are engaged in tasks that have the potential to generate loud noise must be monitored for noise exposure. This may include, but is not limited to:
 - o Groundkeepers involved in lawn mowing, leaf blowing, sawing, etc.;
 - o Masons;
 - o HVAC personnel; and,
 - o General maintenance personnel involved in vacuuming, floor sanding or