

A HIGH-NOISE SAFETY CHECKLIST FOR EMPLOYERS

The average construction worker may encounter any number of loud noises during a shift, but just how loud is too loud? Exposure to loud noises — especially over a long period of time — can cause permanent hearing damage, including ringing in the ears and partial hearing loss. Hearing damage, which is irreversible, can limit a worker's abilities and reduce their overall quality of life. But sounds also help workers orient themselves in the work environment. Reducing sound pollution can help protect everyone's hearing in the field. Loud noises may be commonplace in the construction industry, but business owners and managers are responsible for protecting workers from sounds that could damage their hearing.

If workers are exposed to more than 85 decibels (db) of sound for eight hours on a time-weighted average, employers must implement safety measures to prevent hearing loss, as required by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) occupational noise exposure standard 29 CFR 1910.95. Hearing loss prevention can take many forms. Companies can use quieter equipment, set up sound barriers, and ensure workers wear the proper hearing protection, such as earplugs and earmuffs.

while a lawn mower may clock in at 90 db. Workers only need to be exposed to a lawn mower for 2.5 hours before they could begin to experience hearing loss.

Most of the equipment used in the construction industry is much louder than traffic or lawn mowers. In some cases, a worker may damage their hearing after only a few seconds of exposure. Power tools emit 110 db, and workers can only tolerate 1.5 minutes. Jackhammers and other heavy machinery produce 130 db, and damage can occur in less than one second. If workers exceed the safe noise exposure limit, the company will need to take additional precautions to prevent hearing loss. The best option is to eliminate the loud noises by finding a quieter alternative, such as a newer piece of equipment. Electric motors tend to be quieter than those that run on fossil fuels. Proper equipment maintenance can also help reduce noise pollution. Construction crews should avoid using loud machines whenever possible to limit their effect on workers and the surrounding environment. If this is not an option, the company can set up sound barriers between the worker and the source of the sound or increase the distance between the worker and the source of the sound. For example, workers may be able to remotely pilot equipment to limit their contact with the sound.

Once all these options have been exhausted, the company can use hearing prevention equipment to protect workers. Hearing damage is cumulative. Workers bring a lifetime of noise exposure to the job. A preemployment screening for existing hearing loss may be prudent for those jobs where high-noise environments are expected.

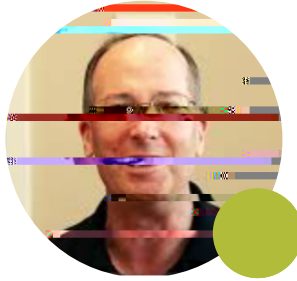
Increase Employee Awareness

Hearing loss prevention requires both teamwork and individual responsibility. Every person occupying the jobsite will need to take precautions to protect their hearing. It's the company's job to inform workers of the potential risks and the importance of using hearing loss protection equipment. Managers should post "High Noise Area" signs in and around locations with loud noises.

Workers should receive training on how to use their hearing loss prevention equipment. The instructions may be verbal,

written, or both. A visual demonstration can help reinforce this information. The training must be available in different languages to accommodate workers of different backgrounds. Workers should feel comfortable coming forward if they have any questions. Workers should also learn to look out for one another on the job. Senior workers could mentor younger workers who may overlook important safety considerations. If a worker notices someone getting too close to a loud sound without proper equipment or lingering in the work area, the worker should remind them to wear appropriate safety gear or leave the jobsite.

Each worker should thoroughly inspect their hearing loss



About the Author

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About the Article

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