



Hearing Conservation Program

Occupational noise is defined as any unwanted sound in the workplace that is a byproduct of industrial processes or surrounding operations. OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Association) has set a limit for noise exposure in the workplace to under 85 dB (decibels). This level is where it has been established that hearing loss could occur over an eight hour work shift. A hearing conservation program standard has been established to preserve and protect employee hearing in the workplace. The action level to initiate a hearing conservation program is at or above 85 dB.

There are five components to a hearing conservation program:

- 1) **Monitoring** – Employers are required to monitor the noise exposure of the employee once there is a known noise exposure. Noise testing by a competent person should be completed every time a new process or piece of equipment is introduced to the area that could add to the noise exposure.
- 2) **Audiogram testing** – Employers are required to have the hearing of their employees in the conservation program checked at hire and annually through audiometric testing. This is at no cost to the employee. The purpose of this is to ensure there is no shift in hearing during the course of employment due to occupational noise. A licensed or certified physician should be the one to conduct the testing and summarize the results with the employer.
- 3) **Hearing Protectors** – The employer should offer different types of hearing protectors to the employees to wear throughout the day. Hearing plugs and hearing earmuffs are two common protectors.
- 4) **Training** – Employees who are in the program should be educated upon hire and annually on the noise they are/will be exposed to, the expectations of the employees in the program, and how to properly apply and wear hearing protectors if applicable.
- 5) **Recordkeeping** – Employers must keep all employee testing records pertaining to hearing for at least two years. There are specific requirements that have to be completed in each employee's file such as the employee's name, job title, date of test, date of equipment calibration, examiner's name and title, and the results from the last audiometric test.


Many resources, standards, exposures and controls, etc. can be found on OSHA's "[Occupational Noise Exposure](#)" webpage.

To help eliminate the need for a hearing conservation program, the employer should consider putting the following items into place:


- **Engineer out the noise source** – This includes modifying or replacing equipment at the noise source. For example: adding sound barriers or enclosing the machinery/process so that the noise is absorbed before reaching the employee’s ears.
- **Administrative controls** – These controls include limiting the time a worker is exposed to noise. If the noise source cannot be engineered out, employee rotation could help reduce the time an employee is exposed to the noise source.

The annual implementation costs of a hearing conservation program run at about \$350 per employee. Wherever possible, elimination or reduction of employee noise exposure through engineering and/or administrative controls should always be considered first. However, if the noise exposure cannot adequately be eliminated or reduced, a hearing conservation program is necessary. The following chart provides examples of noise exposures and the permissible exposure times for these common noises. Employees who are not properly protected, and exposed to the noise source longer than the permissible exposure time are at risk of hearing damage.

Hearing Exposure & Protection

Exposure			Protection
Continuous dB	Comparable Sound	Permissible Exposure Time	
85 dB	City Traffic	8 Hours	
94 dB	Lawn Mower	1 Hour	
100 dB	Construction Site	15 Minutes	
115 dB	Leaf Blower	30 Seconds	
120 dB	Heavy Equipment	7.5 Seconds	

Sources:
<http://dangerousdecibles.org>
<https://www.osha.gov>



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For any additional information regarding hearing conservation programs and hearing protection, please contact Acadia’s Virtual Loss Control Team at 207-874-5701 or virtuallc@acadia-ins.com.

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