



Hear, Hear... or Hear Me Not...

by Levi S. Alejo

The OSHA Construction Standard for Occupational Noise Exposure, 29 CFR 1926.52 requires the development and implementation of a comprehensive Hearing Conservation Program.

Applying Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards, an effective hearing conservation program must incorporate as many of the following elements as are feasible:

(1) **Employee noise exposures monitoring** . Every workplace should be tested for noise levels. 90dbA is the 8-hour exposure threshold value for the construction industry while it is 85dbA for the General Industry.

NOTE: OSHA allows 8 hours of exposure to 90 dBA but only 2 hours of exposure to 100 dBA sound levels. NIOSH would recommend limiting the 8 hour exposure to less than 85 dBA. At 100 dBA, NIOSH recommends less than 15 minutes of exposure per day.

(2) **Application of engineering, work practice, and administrative controls for excessive noise.** Sound isolators and barriers, duty shifting, quiet areas, time limits, warning signages and distance measurements will be required to be implemented to limit noise exposures to within and below the threshold value.

(3) **Each overexposed employee shall be individually fitted with a hearing protector with an adequate noise reduction rating.** Employee comfort in the use of a hearing protector should be taken into consideration in the selection process of an employee's hearing protector.

(4) **Employee training and education regarding noise hazards and protection measures.** This includes education on symptoms of noise-overexposure and also the training in the proper use and maintenance of a hearing protector.

(5) **Baseline and annual audiometry.** It is a good initiative from the employer if even before the Hearing Conservation Program will be implemented, audiometric evaluation of each employee will be conducted.

(6) **Procedures for preventing further occupational hearing loss by an employee whenever such an event has been identified.** Assessment of existing work procedures in addition to engineering controls should be done and necessary changes developed and incorporated once occupational hearing loss was proven from the workplace.

(7) **Recording Keeping.** Remember also that medical records should be kept available for 30 years.

The damage to one's hearing is irreparable and it will be a permanent loss that will adversely affect the worker's personal, professional and social existence. Let us be a responsible partner in the protection and conservation of our workers' auditory senses.