

PPE Hearing Protection

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High noise levels can cause hearing loss and related injuries. If noise exposure measurements determine that noise exposure is at or above 85 decibels averaged over 8 working hours, or an 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA), hearing protection is required, and a separate hearing conservation program per OSHA's 29 CFR 1910.95 Occupational Noise Exposure Standard will be developed.

Common Hazards that Require Hearing Protection

Workplace hazards that could cause hearing loss or injuries include:

- Machinery and tools
- Engines
- Compressors
- Sound-amplifying electronics
- Heavy machinery and vehicles

Common Types of Hearing Protection

A job hazard assessment performed prior to the start of a particular task will determine the type of hearing protection required. Common types of hearing protection include the following:

- Single-use earplug: Self-forming, can be made of foam, coated cotton, silicone rubber, or fiberglass wool.
- Pre-formed/molded earplug: Professionally fitted for the user; can be reusable or disposable.
- Earmuffs: Seal over the ear versus being inserted into the ear canal.

Selection Criteria

Select hearing protection that will reduce noise exposure but still allow for safe communication:

- Look for hearing protection with an ANSI S12.6 standard rating.
- Choose hearing protection based on the type of noise attenuation you need. You may need consistent noise reduction throughout the day, variable noise reduction, or loud impulse noise protection.
- If workers are frequently removing hearing protection, it may be beneficial to provide banded hearing protection (if the banding/cord does not pose any additional workplace hazards).
- Consider environmental conditions, such as indoor/outdoor temperature.

Remember: • Headphones use is not a substitute for using hearing protection.

*Voluntary Use of Hearing Protection

Employees voluntarily using hearing protection must:

- Have the hearing protection device inspected by a PPE-competent person prior to use.
- Understand the limitations of the hearing protection devices.
- Only use approved hearing protection devices.

Hearing Protection Best Practices

Hearing protection is critical in conjunction with other PPE to keep the user safe at work.

- Before use, verify that your equipment is appropriate for the task.
- If hearing protection is labeled as single use, do not reuse it.

- Reusable ear plugs should return to its normal shape after being compressed, otherwise, it should be replaced.
- Earmuff use should have a seal around the ear to avoid letting sound in – be mindful of jewelry, glasses, or facial hair that may interfere with the seal.
- Use clean hands to insert and remove ear plugs.