

HEARING CONSERVATION PROGRAM

An area which is drawing attention across the nation is hearing loss caused by noise in our everyday environment. OSHA has had an Occupational Noise Exposure Standard since 1983. On July 1, 2001, OSHA revised the criteria for recording work-related hearing loss. Beginning on January 1, 2003, employers will be required to record work-related hearing loss cases when an employee's hearing test shows a marked decrease in overall hearing. (See Section 7, OSHA Recordkeeping and Posting for more information.)

Any employer must administer a continuing, effective Hearing Conservation Program (HCP) whenever employee noise exposures equal or exceed an 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA) sound level of 85 decibels measured on the A scale (slow response).

- Buffers and air compressors usually run between 90 to 100 dBA
- Grinders measure between 95 dBA to 105 dBA
- Round saws create between 100 to 115 dBA

Most facilities will have at least a couple of employees who should be included in an employer's Hearing Conservation Program. There is no written program required as in other standards, but many records are mandatory.

Monitoring: When information indicates that any employee's exposure may equal or exceed an 8-hour TWA of 85 dBA, the employer must implement a monitoring program.

1. Samples should be taken to identify employees to be included in the program and to enable the selection of proper hearing protectors.
2. If there is high worker mobility or significant variations in sound level, a representative personal sampling should be taken to comply with monitoring requirements. If an area sample can be shown to produce good monitoring results, this method may be used instead.
3. Monitoring should be repeated whenever there is a change in production, process or equipment which may increase noise and/or include additional employees in the HCP.

Employee Notification: The employer must notify each employee who is exposed to 85 dBA or more over an 8-hour TWA. Affected employees may observe any noise measurements being conducted.

Audiometric Testing Program: This program must be established for all employees included in the HCP at no cost to the employees. The testing should be performed by physicians or certified technicians. A technician who operates microprocessor audiometers does not need to be certified.

1. An audiogram must be given to employees within 6 months after their first exposure to noise above the action level to form the baseline for each employee.
2. An annual audiogram must be obtained for each employee included in the HCP.
3. The annual audiogram must be compared to the baseline to determine if a standard threshold shift has occurred. If there has been a shift, the employee must be informed of this fact, in writing, within 21 days of the audiogram. Hearing protectors must be worn.

Hearing Protectors: These must be available to all employees exposed to an 8-hour TWA of 85 dBA or more and replaced as necessary at no cost to the employee. Hearing protectors must attenuate exposure at least to 90 dBA. If an employee has experienced a standard threshold shift, that level drops to 85 dBA.

Hearing protectors from Composites One can help with your HCP. Call 800/348-7503 for the Composites One Accessories & Equipment Catalog.

Training Program: All employees in the hearing conservation program must be trained on an annual basis. The training should include information about the effects of noise on hearing; the purpose of hearing protectors and instructions on selection, fitting, use and care; and the purpose of audiometric testing with an explanation of the procedures.

Recordkeeping: The employer must maintain an accurate record of noise exposure measurements for two years and all employee audiometric testing for the duration of the affected employee's employment.

Access to Information: The employer must post a copy of the standard in the workplace and inform the employees of their rights to access their records.

If more information is needed on the requirements of this standard, please contact Composites One's Department of Health, Safety & Environment at 800/621-8003.