Hearing Loss is a Liability to Business

Hazard ID – Walk Around & Find

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) require the implementation of a hearing conservation program (HCP) when employee exposure to noise is at or above the Action Level of 85dBA for an 8-hour time weighted average (TWA). Extended work shifts trigger HCP requirements at reduced exposure levels. In addition, the OSHA Occupational Noise Standard 29 CFR 1910.95 calls out an impulse noise limit of 140dBC, that does not trigger HCP requirements but should be addressed in any proactive HCP. To effectively carry out a HCP it is important to know the sources of potentially hazardous noise.

Identifying highly variable hazardous noise sources means taking an inventory of equipment used in processes and tasks, and monitoring noise levels.

During field noise assessments Juler Group has monitored both continuous and impulse noise levels including:

Typical Sound Levels

Item	Decibels (dBA)	Peak dBC
Forklift w/Bkup Alarm	88	90
Grinding	109	125
Water/Air Jetting	110	135
Impact Wrench	103	145
Drilling Rig	102	132
Generator (100kW)	102	110
Air Compressor	90-100	105

It is important to identify all fixed, portable and task related noise exposures. Potential hazardous noise sources include portable water jets for cleaning, air compressors, banging a 5-lb mallet on iron, pumps, cranes, portable generators used to power welding equipment, high pressure test equipment. Identify them and list them in a "High Noise Summary" for your facility.

Hazard Control – Managing Noise Risks

OSHA requires engineering, administrative and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) controls to be evaluated and implemented when a HCP is in force.

A three-pronged approach to controlling hazardous noise exposure is important.

1. Several types types of hearing protection should be made available. NRR and "real-world" factors should be taken into account for FIT and functionality.
2. Administrative controls such as limiting time spent in noisy areas or performing noisy tasks may be employed. Purchasing new equipment should take into account noise and a "buy-quiet" policy should be implemented.
3. Engineering controls such as workplace design (e.g. air compressor rooms, quiet vs. noisy areas), screens, barriers, walls, baffles, mufflers, table mats, dead-blow mallets, increased distance from noise sources to people, noise havens for control consoles, and noise refuges where employees may escape noise are just a few examples.

Combining all three approaches into your HCP will maximize your efforts at managing noise risk.

Regulatory Corner

OSHA requires routine hazard assessments, noise monitoring, hearing tests, training, hearing protection and record keeping to comply with federal standard 29 CFR 1910.95.