

TOOLBOX TALK

HEARING PROTECTION



Construction sites are noisy places, especially during certain phases of a project. But you don't have to accept hearing loss as a cost of working at construction sites. Noise is now recognized by OSHA as a hazard that can cause:

- Temporary or permanent hearing loss.
- Drowsiness, irritability and loss of concentration.
- Decreased morale and stress.
- High blood pressure, ulcers, headaches and sleeping disorders.

There is no cure for noise-induced hearing loss, so preventing exposure to excessive noise is the only way to avoid hearing damage and other hazards. Noise is unwanted sound measured by its frequency (high or low pitch) and its intensity (loudness measured in decibels / dB). High frequencies are most damaging. By OSHA rules, construction workers are not to be exposed to more than an average of 85 dB over an eight-hour period without hearing protection being provided.

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Hearing protection devices do not block out sound completely, but they give some protection by reducing the amount of sound reaching your ear. At the same time, you will be able to hear speech and important machinery sounds.

An employer must assess the site and determine if hearing protection is needed. Also, as needed, there must be an attempt made to reduce the amount of noise by using engineering and administrative controls – like having you work far from noisy equipment, limiting the amount of time you spend in noisy environments, and installing antivibration machine mountings or acoustical enclosures. If hazardous noise remains, the various hearing protection devices that your company is to provide to you include earplugs, earmuffs or canal caps.

Ultimately, you are responsible for protecting your own hearing. Here are some points to remember about protecting your sense of hearing:

- Make sure your hearing protection fits.
- Don't use homemade hearing protection devices; they don't work.
- Keep hearing protection devices in good condition.
- Wear hearing protection devices at work as required and at home when working on noisy projects.

