



Introduction

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, employers must establish a hearing conservation program when noise levels reach or exceed 85 dBA or A-weighted decibels, a unit of measurement for sound intensity. This program includes monitoring noise levels, providing hearing protection, conducting annual audiometric testing, and training employees on the risks of noise exposure and proper use of hearing protection.

Effective hearing protection devices include earplugs and earmuffs. Employers should provide a variety of options to ensure comfort and compatibility with the individual and the work environment. Proper training on how to use these devices is essential for effectiveness.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Employers are required to monitor noise levels and inform employees about their exposure. If noise levels exceed the action level of 85 dBA, a monitoring program must be implemented to identify employees at risk and select appropriate hearing protectors. If you need to raise your voice to speak to someone 3 feet away, noise levels might be over 85 decibels. Several sound-measuring instruments are available to measure the noise levels in a workspace. These include sound level meters, noise dosimeters, and octave band analyzers.

The [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Sound Level Meter App](#) is one

tool available to download on mobile iOS devices that measures sound levels in the workplace and provides noise exposure parameters to help reduce occupational noise-induced hearing loss.

Free Audiometric Testing

Annual audiometric testing is required for employees exposed to hazardous noise levels. This testing helps to identify any hearing loss early and allows for timely intervention.

Engineering Controls

Before relying solely on personal protective equipment, employers should implement engineering and administrative controls to reduce noise exposure. This may include modifying equipment or processes to minimize noise at the source.

Best Practices

Employers should ensure that hearing protectors are properly fitted and maintained. Training should cover the importance of hearing protection, how to use it correctly, and the potential consequences of noise exposure.

Signs that noise may be a problem in the workplace:

- Employees hear ringing or humming in the ears when leaving work.
- Coworkers have to shout to be heard by employees an arm's length away.
- Employees experience temporary hearing loss when leaving work.

Please contact EHS at 744-7241 or ehs@okstate.edu for an official evaluation of noise levels on the OSU campus.