

# Preventing Hearing Loss Injuries at Work

To prevent hearing loss in the workplace, employers must reduce noise levels and/or the length of time a worker is exposed to noise. The noise level is measured in decibels (dB).

The best way to reduce noise levels in the workplace is to control it before it reaches the ears. This is called engineered noise control. Options include:

- **Purchase quieter equipment.** Check out noise levels before buying and ask about quieter options. For example, a slower speed fan will have less noise than one with higher speeds.
- **Fit existing equipment with noise control devices.** Check with suppliers for mufflers, silencers, or special nozzles designed to reduce noise. Add damping materials to chutes and bins.
- **Enclose the source of the noise.** An enclosure lined with sound-absorbing material can reduce noise levels by 25 dB. It may also double as a safety guard and/or environmental barrier.
- **Protect workers in a booth.** Operator booths that are lined with sound-absorbing material generally reduce noise levels by 20 dB.

When workers spend most of their time within the booth, it can reduce the risk of injury by lowering both noise levels and exposure times.

If engineering controls are not possible or don't reduce the noise to acceptable levels consider administrative controls, such as reducing the length of time workers are exposed to the noise. For example, have workers switch halfway through their shift to a quieter machine or area of the building.

Hearing protective devices such as ear plugs or ear muffs can be used to supplement engineering and administrative controls. Hearing protective devices are also used in cases where engineering and administrative controls cannot be used or as an interim measure, for example while engineering controls are being installed. Hearing protective devices should be selected to meet Canadian Standards Association (CSA) Standards and take into consideration criteria such as daily noise exposure, communication demands, and the work environment.

To learn the legal requirements for hearing protection, consult your Federal and/or Provincial Occupational Health and Safety Regulations.

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