

### How loud is too loud?

Do your employees have to raise their voices or shout to be heard above the background noise? This is an indicator of too much noise. The following is a summary of the major requirements of the Occupational Noise Exposure rules.

# A hearing conservation program

Oregon OSHA's hearing protection rule, 1910.95,
Occupational noise exposure, says your workplace
must have a hearing conservation program when
employees are exposed to noise levels equal to or
greater than 85 A-weighted decibels (dBA) averaged
over eight hours. The basic elements of a hearing
conservation program include:

- Exposure monitoring
- Audiometric testing
- Hearing protection
- Employee training
- Recordkeeping
- Access to information

### Exposure monitoring

Exposure monitoring can help you determine where it is too loud, when it is too loud, whose hearing may be at risk, and the level of hearing protection employees may need. There are two types: **personal monitoring** and **area monitoring**. Personal monitoring measures sound levels near individual workers, usually over eight hours.

Area monitoring measures sound levels at different locations in the workplace, usually at a single point in time. A dosimeter is generally used for personal monitoring while a sound-level meter is used for area monitoring.

An exposure weighted to account for time and changing noise levels over eight hours is called an eight-hour time-weighted average (TWA-8).

Employees must have the opportunity to observe exposure monitoring and must be notified about the results if they are exposed at or above the 85 dBA limit.



Phone: 503-378-3272 Toll-free: 800-922-2689 Fax: 503-947-7461 Conduct monitoring whenever a change in your workplace – a production process or equipment change, for example – may raise noise levels above the 85 dBA limit.

If noise levels exceed TWA-8 of 90 dBA, you must use all feasible engineering, administrative, or work-practice controls to reduce the noise exposure to or below the permissible exposure limit (PEL). If these controls are insufficient to reduce exposure below the PEL, then you must provide personal protective equipment along with other controls to reduce exposures to the lowest achievable level.

### Audiometric testing

Audiometric testing determines whether an employee's hearing is stable or getting worse over time. The testing instrument is an audiometer and the result of the test is an audiogram that graphs an employee's hearing ability at different frequency levels.

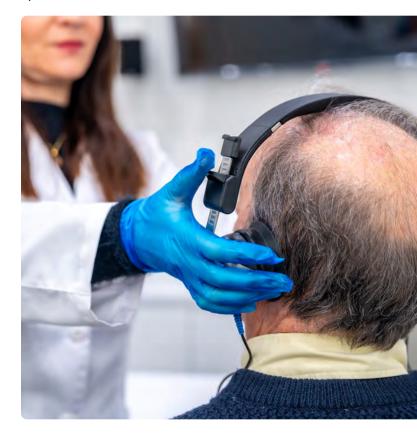
A licensed or certified audiologist, otolaryngologist, other physician, or a technician who is certified by the Council for Accreditation in Occupational Hearing Conservation must perform and evaluate annual testing for all employee exposures greater than 85 dBA. Baseline audiograms must occur within six months of the date of an employee's first exposure to noise above the action level. Compare subsequent annual audiograms to their baseline to determine if hearing loss has occurred. If the comparison shows a standard threshold shift, you must either accept the results or retest the employee within 30 days. Employees should avoid any activities that would expose them to high levels of noise for 14 hours before the test.

#### Standard threshold shift

A standard threshold shift is a significant change or loss in hearing compared to the baseline in either ear. Employees who show a standard threshold shift and are exposed to a TWA-8 of 85 dBA or above **must** wear hearing protectors on the job.

#### Follow-up procedures

If any audiogram shows a standard threshold shift, notify the employee in writing within 21 days of receiving the report and record the results on your OSHA 300 Log. Employees with a documented hearing loss must be fitted with hearing protectors, trained in their use and care, and required to use them. Employees who were already using hearing protectors must be refitted and retrained. Some employees may need to be referred to a qualified specialist for additional evaluation.



### Recordkeeping

Maintain all records, including employee exposure measurements and audiograms. Audiometric test records must include the following:

- 1. Name and job classification of the employee
- 2. Date of the audiogram
- 3. Name of the examiner
- Date of the last calibration of the audiometer, including information on the background noise level of the audiometric test booth
- Employee's most recent noise exposure measurement

If the audiometric test shows a standard threshold shift, record it on your OSHA 300 Log.

Noise exposure measurements must be kept for at least two years and audiometric test records for the duration of the affected employee's employment. Provide access to these records to employees and their representatives upon request.

## **Employee training**

Train all employees in your hearing conservation program annually. Include the following information:

- 1. Effects of noise on hearing
- 2. Purpose of hearing protection
- Advantages and disadvantages of various types of hearing protection
- 4. Selection, use, and care of hearing protection
- 5. Purpose of annual audiometric testing

Provide the applicable Occupational Noise Exposure rule to employees and their representatives upon request.

### Resources

- Oregon OSHA's Noise topic page Occupational Noise Exposure Rules and related information



Visit Oregon OSHA

#### **Workers**

Your employer cannot retaliate against you for reporting a workplace health or safety concern or violation. For more information about your rights, visit the Oregon OSHA website.



