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Subject: Recordkeeping - Noise

This issue originated as an email from an employer.

Issue: Upon our having an employee's hearing tested from one period to the next period, the results indicate the employee's hearing show that there is "significant hearing loss." Do I document this as a reportable injury/illness?

Answer: When hearing tests show a shift in hearing, the rules are a little complicated for when this is recorded.

Essentially, there are two criteria that must be met before a shift needs to be recorded. First, the average hearing level in the 2000, 3000, and 4000 hertz range must be 25 decibels (dB) or higher above audiometric zero. Second, there must be an average 10 dB difference in those same frequencies between the baseline audiogram and the annual audiogram. If both of those are true, then it must be recorded. If only one of those is true, then you do not need to record it.

For example, if the baseline results showed a hearing level of 0 dB and the annual shows a level of 20 dB, even though a significant shift has occurred, it has not reached that 25 dB threshold above audiometric zero yet, so it does not need to be recorded.

There are two appendices to the recordkeeping rule. The first one explains the age-correction for audiograms. The second one is a flowchart for determining how and when to record a shift. These are available at http://www.orosha.org/pdf/rules/division_1/437-001-0700-0742.pdf#page=23