

Noise exposure



Key takeaways

- Hearing loss can be gradual, happening over several years without you realizing it.
- Exposure to excessive noise is the major avoidable cause of permanent hearing loss.
- Permanent hearing loss can be prevented by properly wearing the right hearing protection for the job.

Loud noise damages the nerves in your inner ears. Those nerves can't be repaired, which results in hearing loss. This type of loss is permanent, and you could spend the rest of your life missing out on music, conversations, and other sounds.

Hearing loss can be very gradual, usually happening over several years. Noise-induced hearing loss is the most prevalent occupational disease; it is caused by harmful levels of noise. Exposure to noise of 85 decibels or above over an eight-hour period requires hearing protection, according to the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH).

Wear approved hearing protection whenever you enter an area posted as having high levels of noise, whether it is noisy when you enter or not. Loud equipment can start up at any time.

Make sure your hearing protection is the right type for the environment and that it is comfortable. If you choose to wear disposable foam earplugs, make sure you insert them properly. If you are not sure

how, ask your supervisor for training, consult the manufacturer's guide, or refer to this handout on saif.com: https://www.saif.com/Documents/SafetyandHealth/NoiseHearingProtection/S1045_Properly_fitted_earplugs.pdf.

Earbuds (music headphones) are not hearing protection. When using earbuds, your noise exposure consists of the noise level around you plus the sound of the music. High levels of sound from music can cause hearing loss and prevent you from hearing workplace alarms or warning signals.

Additional resources

Find more information on the noise/hearing protection page on saif.com: <https://www.saif.com/safety-and-health/topics/chemical-and-other-health-hazards/noise/hearing-protection.html>.

Take action (Complete one or more activities as a team)

- A. HEARING PROTECTION REVIEW: The level of noise reduction or attenuation will be listed on the hearing protection packaging as the Noise Reduction Rating (NRR). What types of hearing protection are available and where are they stored? What are the different NRRs of the earplugs/muffs you will be wearing?
- B. FIELD TRIP: Walk around your work area and identify sources of noise. Which type of hearing protection would be required for each task or area?
- C. DISCUSS: Have you or someone you know worked in a high-noise work area without wearing any kind of hearing protection? Why wasn't hearing protection used?

