

WEEKLY SAFETY TIP – 7/26/10 – YOU NEED TO HEAR THIS!

An estimated 30 million workers are exposed to loud noises over the Permissible Exposure Limit (PEL), according to OSHA. Loud noises, in addition to affecting your hearing, may create or increase physical and psychological stress, reduce productivity, interfere with communication, and contribute to accidents and injuries by making it difficult to hear warning signals. But there is good news, in that through the use of engineering controls and hearing conservation plans, most noise can be eliminated or reduced to below the PEL.

IN 29 CFR 1910.95 (linked here:

http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=9735&p_text_version=FALSE), OSHA defines the controls for hearing conservation as well as how to prepare a hearing conservation plan. Subsection (b)(1) states that “*feasible administrative or engineering controls shall be utilized.*” If those controls don’t work, then you reach for the hearing protection, **but not before**. (OSHA also has a hearing conservation regulation for the Construction Industry – 29 CFR 1926.101, linked here: http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=10664)

You can guess that you might need a hearing conservation plan if you have to raise your voice to be heard when talking to the person next to you, or within a few feet. That is, a PEL of 90 decibels, or action level of 85 decibels. What does that sound like? Some garbage disposals operate at about 85 decibels. If the noise seems loud at your work site, you may need to monitor the noise levels. If it is too loud, OSHA states that you should use engineering to control the noise. Engineering controls are always the first line of defense for any hazard, noise included. What are some engineering controls for noise? We have a few suggestions:

1. Switch it. If there is a choice between a tool, piece of equipment or machine that does not make as much noise, and a louder one – use the quieter one.
2. Muffle it. Some pieces of equipment or machines can have sound mufflers or barriers installed that will help to reduce the amount of noise that reaches workers.
3. Distance it. If you can, move the work away from the equipment, tool or machine, you will lessen the amount of noise in the immediate area.

OSHA has an e-tool that was created in alliance with the National Hearing Conservation Program (NHCP). It can walk you through evaluating whether you need a hearing conservation program, and provide you with further suggestions. Here’s a link to the e-tool: <http://www.osha.gov/dts/osta/otm/noise/index.html>.

Part of a Hearing Conservation program is to train your staff on hearing conservation. Need an effective training program that is effective and easy to use? Take a look at our online course:

http://www.hazmatschool.com/descriptions/HEARING_1336_information.html

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