

● SAFETY HANDOUT: Occupational Hearing Conservation

October is National Protect Your Hearing Month

👂 The Golden Rule: Noise-Induced Hearing Loss is 100% Permanent, but 100% Preventable.

Unlike a cut or a broken bone, your ears do not heal over time. Hazardous noise damages the delicate microscopic hair cells (cilia) inside your inner ear. Once these cells die, they **never grow back**, resulting in permanent noise-induced hearing loss or a relentless ringing in your ears known as **Tinnitus**.

1. How Loud is Too Loud?

If you have to shout to be heard by someone standing just **an arm's length away**, the ambient noise level is hazardous (exceeding **85 decibels**) and requires active protection.

Equipment / Environment	Average Noise Level	Max Exposure Limit (Without PPE)
Normal Conversation	60 dB	No limit
Heavy Machinery / Mixers	85 – 90 dB	8 Hours (OSHA Threshold)
Packagers / Conveyors	95 dB	2 Hours
Boilers / Compressors	100 dB	15 Minutes

2. The 3 Steps to Proper Earplug Insertion

Simply pushing an earplug halfway into your ear canal does not protect you. Follow the standard **Roll, Pull, and Hold** method recommended by the [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health \(NIOSH\)](#):

1. **Roll:** Using clean hands, roll the entire foam earplug into a tight, narrow cylinder between your thumb and fingers.
2. **Pull:** Reach over your head with the opposite hand and pull the top of your ear **up and back** to straighten out your inner ear canal.
3. **Hold:** Insert the rolled earplug deeply into the canal and hold it in place with your finger for **20 to 30 seconds** until it fully expands and seals out noise.

Safety Check: If a coworker looks at you from the front, the earplugs should not be visibly sticking straight out of your ears. They should be seated snugly inside the ear canal.

3. Quick Safety Checklist for the Floor

- **Inspect Your PPE Daily:** Look for tears, dirt, or cracked seals on earmuffs and earplugs. Replace disposable plugs at the start of every shift.
- **Don't Cheat the Seal:** Removing your hearing protection for "just a few minutes" in a high-noise zone dramatically decreases your cumulative daily protection.
- **Maintain Dual Protection Where Required:** In extreme noise zones (exceeding 100 dB), standard earplugs must be worn *underneath* industrial earmuffs to achieve proper mitigation.
- **Keep Hands Clean:** Rolling foam earplugs with dirty or oily hands can transfer bacteria directly into your ear canal, causing painful ear infections.