

PPE Focus of the Month

HEARING PROTECTION

Protect What You Can't Replace

Noise is a part of life - concerts, motorcycles, power tools, and even loud headphones. But constant exposure to high noise levels, on or off the job, can cause permanent hearing damage. The good news? Workplace hearing loss is preventable with the right controls, protection, and training.



+ How Loud Is Too Loud?

- Hearing loss can come from one loud sound or repeated exposure over time.
- Noise is measured in decibels (dB):
 - Whisper: 30 dB
 - Normal conversation: 60 dB
 - Motorcycle: 95 dB
 - Factory floor: 100 dB
 - Chainsaw: 110 dB
- Noise above 85 dB over an 8-hour shift can damage hearing.
- The louder the noise, the less time it takes — with every 3 dB increase, safe exposure time is cut in half.
- Exposures are cumulative: running a noisy tool for 30 minutes straight or for three 10-minute sessions in one day can cause the same level of hearing damage.

+ Common Workplace Noise Levels

- Air compressor (3 ft): 92 dB → Damage in <2 hours
- Power drill: 98 dB → Damage in 30 minutes
- Factory environment: 100 dB → Damage in 15 minutes
- Power saw (3 ft): 110 dB → Damage in under 2 minutes

If you need to raise your voice to talk to someone at arm's length, it's probably loud enough to cause damage.

+ Protecting Hearing on the Job

1. Eliminate the Hazard
 - Whenever possible, remove or replace noisy equipment.
2. Reduce Noise Levels
 - Choose low-decibel tools and machines.
 - Limit time spent in high-noise areas with administrative controls.
3. Use PPE that Works
 - Earplugs: Highest protection, but only if inserted correctly.
 - Ear muffs: Easier to wear, still effective for most tasks.
 - Train employees to use hearing protection properly - consistency matters.

Why it Matters

Once hearing is gone, it doesn't come back. Protecting workers from noise exposure protects their quality of life - on and off the clock.

