

NOISE

Noise is often defined as unpleasant or unwanted sound. Therefore, often the difference between sound and noise is based upon the attitude of the receiver. When we evaluate sound, and it's impact on hearing, we typically refer to it as noise.

How Does Noise Affect Us?

Overexposure to noise can be distracting and irritating. Perhaps the most significant affect excessive noise can have is hearing loss. The ear is designed to receive, separate, and send sounds to the brain. This complex process involves many delicate parts, including nerves. A single explosion may cause damage. Repeated noise above certain levels can result in hearing loss.

Loudness of noise is measured in decibels (dBA). The risk of hearing loss increases when exposures are consistently above 85 dBA for 8 hours or 82.1 dBA for 12 hours. High-frequency noises are more likely to harm hearing than low-frequency noises. Noise that is both loud and high-pitched has the worst affect on hearing.

Hearing loss from noise can be temporary or permanent. Repeated temporary losses may lead to permanent loss if not stopped. We do not adjust to loud noise...we lose our hearing.

Who Can Be Affected?

Everyone is exposed to noise in their day-to-day activities, whether it be at work, home or recreation. Noise becomes hazardous when we are routinely exposed to an average of 85 dBA for 8 hours or 82.1 dBA for 12 hours.

How Is Hearing Loss Prevented?

OSHA requires the company to implement a Hearing Conservation Program if noise exposures reach 85 dBA for 8 hours or 82.1 dBA for 12 hours. Anyone working at a position where noise is at these levels is placed in the Hearing Conservation Program. Hearing is checked annually, education about hearing protectors and hearing loss is provided, and hearing protection is provided (and it's use is encouraged).

If noise exposures reach 90 dBA for 8 hours or 87.1 dBA for 12 hours, hearing protection is required. If possible, controls will be used to lower the noise levels. If possible, controls will be used to lower the noise levels. Controls may include such things as maintenance, replacing noisy materials with quieter substances, using sound-absorbing materials around equipment, or job rotation. Remember to protect your hearing when off-the-job too. Use minimal volume settings on your stereo and headsets, and wear hearing protection while operating loud equipment (such as lawn mowers or chain saws) or if hunting or shooting.