

Stanford University Hearing Conservation Program

Frequently Asked Questions

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Hearing Conservation Program Questions

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Stanford University Hearing Conservation Program

Frequently Asked Questions

General Questions

1. Does my workplace have a noise hazard problem?

The noise level will likely exceed 85 decibels (the allowable noise level for an 8-hour day) if any of these conditions occurs:

- The noise at the workplace is so loud that you have to raise your voice to be heard at a normal conversational distance.
- When you leave work and are in a quieter environment and your ears feel plugged.
- Or you hear a mild ringing or whooshing noise that goes away after an hour or two.

When this happens call Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S) at 723-0448 for a noise survey.

Hearing Conservation Program Questions

2. If EH&S determines there is a noise hazard, what should the supervisor do next?

If EH&S determines there is a noise hazard which requires engineering or administrative controls, the following procedures should be implemented:

- Eliminate or reduce the noise hazard to the extent possible through engineering controls and work practices;
- Label the work area and/or equipment as noise hazardous;
- Provide hearing protectors when controls are not possible or insufficient, or while controls are being implemented;
- Provide training on preventing noise-inducing hearing loss and proper use of hearing protective devices;
- Enroll your overexposed employees in the Hearing Conservation Program.

3. How does the supervisor enroll the overexposed employees in the Hearing Conservation Program?

Notify your Department Safety Person and EH&S with names and job titles of the personnel exposed as well as the supervisor contact name, department, phone and e-mail. Then schedule audiograms and training.

Medical Questions

4. How does the supervisor schedule an audiogram?

Call our Occupational Health Provider for a baseline audiogram (if this is his/her first) or annual audiogram. A new employee's audiogram should be done within six months of being hired. High noise exposure must be avoided for 14 hours prior to an exam.

5. Does age affect your hearing ability?

It's true that most people's hearing gets worse as they get older. But for the average person, aging does not cause impaired hearing before at least the age of 60. People who are not exposed to noise and are otherwise healthy, keep their hearing for many years. People who are exposed to noise and do not protect their hearing begin to lose their hearing at an early age.

6. Since I already have hearing loss and wear a hearing aid, hearing prevention programs don't apply to me, right?

If you have hearing loss, it's important to protect the hearing that you have left. Loud noises can continue to damage your hearing making it even more difficult to communicate at work and with your family and friends.

Training Questions

7. How does the supervisor schedule training?

Call EH&S at 723-0448.

Hearing Protective Devices

8. Can you poke out your eardrums with earplugs?

That is unlikely for two reasons. First, the average ear canal is about 1 ¼ inches long. The typical earplug is between ½ to ¾ of an inch long. So even if you

inserted the entire earplug, it would still not touch the ear-drum. Second, the path from the opening of the ear canal to the ear drum is not straight. In fact, it is quite irregular. This prevents you from poking objects into the eardrum.

9. We work in a dusty, dirty place. Should I worry that our ears will get infected by using earplugs?

Using earplugs will not cause an infection. Have clean hands when using earplugs that need to be rolled or formed with your fingers. If this is inconvenient, there are disposable pre-molded earplugs or that have stems so that you can insert them without having to touch the part that goes into the ear canal.

10. Can you hear warning sounds, such as backup beeps, when wearing hearing protectors?

There are fatal injuries because people do not hear warning sounds. However, this is usually because the background noise was too high or because the person had a severe hearing loss. Using hearing protectors will bring both the noise and the warning sound down equally. If the warning sound is audible without the hearing protector, it will be audible when wearing the hearing protector.