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RESOLUTION

Early Warning Signs of Hearing Loss



Early Warning Signs of Hearing Loss

Are You Aware?

Nearly 30 million workers in America are exposed to hazardous noise levels every day. According to the Mayo Clinic, chronic exposure to loud noise is considered a significant contributor to hearing loss. Over time, excessive noise levels can damage the delicate hair cells of the inner ear, which may result in hearing loss or tinnitus (ringing of the ears).

Since damage happens gradually, the risks for hearing loss are often underestimated. For those workers in factories, heavy industries, construction sites and mines the risk of hearing loss is especially high, and its damage is irreversible.

Early warnings signs of hearing loss include:

- Muffled speech
- Difficulty understanding words (especially against background noise or crowds)
- Trouble differentiating consonants
- Frequently requesting people repeat themselves or speak slower
- Turning up the volume on television, radio, walkie-talkie, cell phone, etc.
- Conversation avoidance or withdrawal
- Avoiding social gatherings

Often these symptoms arise gradually and may indicate deterioration rather than loss. However, if symptoms onset suddenly or are contained to only one ear, see a medical professional immediately.

Are You Prepared?

Within construction and/or mining occupations, employers must ensure each jobsite has an effective program to adequately protect workers' hearing. This program should meet regulations and encourage workers to protect themselves from hearing loss through the use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

OSHA offers the following guidelines to prevent hearing loss:

- use quietest equipment possible
- position noisy equipment as far from workers as possible
- if possible, on affected jobsites, provide a barrier between a noisy generator and workers
- set a generator on sand or soil to absorb some of the noise



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Employees frequently exposed to hazardous levels of noise should have their hearing screened regularly. Results should be compared with previous screens to ensure employees are adequately protecting their hearing.

Hearing loss impacts a person socially, emotionally and medically. Noisy situations make hearing difficult, and a person may answer or respond inappropriately in conversation. A person may feel stressed or embarrassed as they strain to hear and decipher what is being said. Alternately, they may become annoyed, believing that people cannot hear or understand them. Like other medical conditions, a person may be predisposed to hearing loss or be taking medications that can harm the hearing system. However, exposure to loud sounds over a period of time, or single exposure to an explosive noise, remains a contributing factor to the hearing loss of hazardous industry employees.

What Next?

Employers should evaluate the effectiveness of their hearing loss prevention program. Arbill.com notes that a hearing loss prevention program "if implemented successfully, benefits the company by reducing medical expenses, worker compensation costs and minimizes or eliminates the long term effects of hearing loss."

Most importantly, employers should monitor noise level exposure and provide proper protective equipment. Visibly mark any area where noise exposure exceeds 85 dBA. By training employees to recognize the warning signs of noise exposure, workers can utilize additional protection. Finally, by keeping thorough records and continuously monitoring the safety program, employers are demonstrating safety protocol and good business practices.

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Protective hearing device that might be worn on the job:

- pre-formed, reusable earplugs
- custom molded earplugs manufactured by licensed hearing protection provider
- earmuffs
- canal caps (least protective)





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The Berkley Industrial Comp Difference

For on the spot intake when an accident occurs, our RESOLUTION Team has developed a Supervisor's Incident Investigation Report available on our website in English and Spanish. For quick and easy submittal of a First Report of Injury use the Berkley Industrial Comp portal online. We offer quick turnarounds on reports, so workers can receive treatment and return to work as soon as possible.

For promoting jobsite safety, Toolbox Talks, accessed through our website are a valuable resource we offer our insureds. These training videos and handouts, developed by our R.A.M.P. (Risk Assessment Management and Prevention) Team, can assist management and supervisors in helping employees recognize and minimize jobsite hazards.

When a claim is necessary, the Berkley Industrial Comp RESOLUTION Team has committed to timely, proactive solutions. We offer personal attention to our partners with unparalleled accessibility, expertise, flexibility and collaboration.

Berkley Industrial Comp is pleased to share this material with its customers. Please note, however, that nothing in this document should be construed as legal advice or the provision of professional consulting services. This material is for general informational purposes only, and while reasonable care has been utilized in compiling this information, no warranty or representation is made as to accuracy or completeness.



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