

Hearing Conservation Program: 1910.95

If your workplace exposes employees to a noise level that averages at or above 85 dB(A), OSHA requires specific training and hearing protection for workers. Don't put your employees at risk for hearing loss, or your company at risk for workers comp claims and OSHA violations.

The hearing conservation program requires employers to monitor noise exposure levels in a way that accurately identifies employees exposed to noise at or above 85 decibels (dB(A)) averaged over 8 working hours, or an 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA). Employers must monitor all employees whose noise exposure is equivalent to or greater than a noise exposure received in 8 hours where the noise level is constantly 85 dB(A). The exposure measurement must include all continuous, intermittent, and impulsive noise within an 80 dB(A) to 130 dB(A) range and must be taken during a typical work situation. This requirement is performance-oriented because it allows employers to choose the monitoring method that best suits each individual situation.

When is an employer required to provide hearing protectors? Employers must provide hearing protectors to all workers exposed to 8-hour TWA noise levels of 85 dB(A) or above. Employees must wear hearing protectors:

- For any period exceeding 6 months from the time they are first exposed to 8-hour TWA noise levels of 85 dB(A) or above;
- If they have incurred standard threshold shifts that demonstrate they are susceptible to noise;
- If they are exposed to noise over the permissible exposure limit of 90 dB(A) over an 8-hour TWA.

Where do we go from here? The first action item is to complete is a noise survey of your facility. Take a layout of the facility with you along with a handheld noise dosimeter. Check all parts of the facility. Especially the known noisy areas. Write down the readings on the layout drawing as you go. Remember to check the areas when the facility is operating normally and creating the most noise. Once all the facility has been monitored go back to your office and review the data. Determine if any employees work for significant periods of time in the areas where the noise level is >85 dB(A). Once this is determined conduct noise monitoring for an 8-hour period for all employees working in the >85 dB(A) noise areas. If more than one employee works in the same area, a representative amount of monitoring needs to be conducted. You may want to hire a third party to conduct this monitoring or do it in-house. The goal is to determine the 8-hour time weighted average exposures. If an employee's 8-hour TWA is >85 dB(A) a Hearing Conservation Program must be administered.

Implementation: The following needs to be implemented if the monitoring determines that employees are exposed to >85 dB(A) of noise: 1) Establish a hearing conservation program 2) Mandatory hearing protection at >90 dB(A), 3) Baseline and annual hearing testing, 4) Annual employee training and education, 5) Records kept for duration of employment.

TABLE G-16 - PERMISSIBLE NOISE EXPOSURES (1)

Duration per day, hours	Sound level dB(A) slow response
8	90
6	92
4	95
3	97
2	100
1 ½	102
1	105
½	110
1/4 or less	115

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