

TOOLBOX TALK #10

HEARING AIDS AS HEARING PROTECTION?

If the hearing aid manufacturer can produce documentation of a noise reduction rating (NRR) for a programmable hearing aid, would OSHA consider that device as an adequate hearing protector under their standards?

Yes, an assigned NRR is a manufacturer's rating of the device's effectiveness to attenuate noise. The adequacy of the hearing protection is determined by the effectiveness in attenuating or reducing noise that reaches the inner ear. The measure of effectiveness is called the NRR. The NRR is a laboratory-derived numerical estimate of attenuation that is provided by the hearing protector. The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires manufacturers of hearing protection to identify the noise reduction capability of all hearing protectors sold in the United States, and to present the NRR on the package label of the device. OSHA is aware that some manufacturers of hearing aids have also designed hearing protection into their devices with an assigned NRR>

To evaluate the adequacy of any hearing protector's attenuation, the employer must refer to the mandatory Appendix B to the general industry standard 1910.95. The NRR of the hearing protector is compared to an individual worker's noise environment to determine whether the exposure is attenuated to the level required by the OSHA standard. For employees with no standard threshold shift (STS), the hearing protector must attenuate noise exposure to an 8-hour time-weighted average of at least 90 dBA. For employees who have experienced an STS, the hearing protector must attenuate exposure to 85 dBA or below.

