

TOOLBOX TALK #31

HEARING CONSERVATION VS HEARING LOSS PREVENTION

OSHA hearing standards are designed to prevent hearing loss but commonly encounter a lack of compliance because of perception, personality and other variables. Here are a few of the top concerns that negatively affect hearing conservation programs:

- According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 1.1 billion young people worldwide are at risk of hearing loss because of unsafe listening practices. This means more workers will enter employment with hearing loss.
- Work conditions can be dynamic and unpredictable. Hearing conservation programs address environmental noise but have a hard time obtaining an accurate picture of the noise exposure for a specific task, making calculated risk at the individual worker level difficult.
- Employee objections: “It’s difficult to hear in noisy environments,” “I’m used to the noise”, “I’m uncomfortable”, “I forget”, “It’s dirty.” Blocking out all noise isn’t always the answer. So manufacturers make hearing protection devices that provide many different levels of attenuation, from ear muffs that provide a noise reduction rating of 20 to earplugs that provide an NRR of 33. Additionally, many styles are compatible with other personal protective equipment, as well as multiple dispenser options to make hearing protection readily available.

Understanding the importance of personalized hearing loss prevention is the key to long-term protection. Losing your hearing isn’t a badge of honor – it can, and should, be prevented. Here are a few ways it can be done:

- Work with your distributor to identify and select PPE that features technological improvements such as foam quality and adjustability. Both can help provide lasting comfort.
- Fit testing is critical to support employee knowledge and motivation. Understanding what works best for employees helps personalize the experience. In addition to training employees on the proper fit of ear plugs, consider a stemmed product that’s easy to insert, along with offering multiple types of earplugs to ensure comfort for all workers.
- In addition to fit testing, new methods to personalize hearing loss prevention includes providing new data points and tools. Smart hearing solutions are being introduced to the market to encourage a change in worker behavior. This can mean identifying individuals most likely at risk of noise-induced hearing loss, sharing insights with them about their behavior and designing personalized hearing conservation programs to meet their needs. Smart hearing solutions provide personal noise exposure monitoring to industrial hygienists and supervisors, allowing them to see what their employees are hearing and improve safety regulation compliance.