

TOOLBOX TALK #41

MUSIC HEADPHONES ON CONSTRUCTION SITES

Question: *Some headphones are equipped with a built-in volume limiter and are marked as “OSHA Approved” for use in the workplace. Is there a specific OSHA regulation that prohibits the use of headphones to listen to music on a construction site?*

OSHA’s Response: No. There is no specific OSHA regulation that prohibits the use of headphones on a construction site. OSHA’s standard for Occupational Noise Exposure in construction sets permissible noise exposure limits and requires the employer to protect employees subject to sound levels exceeding these limits. OSHA’s Hearing Protection Standard requires that ear protective devices be provided by the employer and used wherever necessary to reduce noise levels below the levels set forth previously. A portable music player is not a substitute for hearing protection, however. The noise exposure on the jobsite, or through the use of volume-limiting headphones, must not exceed OSHA’s set limits.

The use of headphone on a construction site may be permissible at managerial discretion, unless such use creates or augments other hazards apart from noise. For example, struck-by hazards are one of the four leading causes of death in construction. It is the employer’s responsibility to ensure employees are not exposed to struck-by hazards while performing their work. Listening to music may produce a safety hazard by masking environmental sounds that need to be heard, especially on active construction sites where attention to moving equipment, heavy machinery, vehicle traffic and safety warning signals may be compromised.

Additionally, some manufacturers may claim that their products are “OSHA Approved” or “100% OSHA Compliant”. OSHA does not register, certify, approve or otherwise endorse commercial or private sector entities, products or services. Therefore, any such claims by a manufacturer are misleading.