

## TOOLBOX TALK #9

### HEARING PROTECTION COMPLIANCE

According to the CDC, hearing loss is the third most chronic physical condition among adults, with about 12% of the working population experiencing hearing difficulties. Of these, nearly ¼ suffer from hearing difficulty caused by workplace exposures. CDC considers noise hazardous when it reaches 85 decibels or higher. So roughly 22 million workers are exposed to hazardous noise each year.



When it comes to selecting hearing protection, products must have the correct noise reduction

rating (NRR) – a unit of measurement that determines the effectiveness of hearing protection devices to decrease sound exposure within a working environment. Hearing protectors are classified by their potential to reduce noise in decibels and must be tested by an ANSI standard to be compliant.

Functionality is the key for employee compliance. A variety of products on the market use different technologies to protect users' hearing. Some feature noise isolation technology that functions best when workers are in consistently loud environments. There also is situational-awareness technology that uses precise impulse filtration to block only harmful levels of noise while allowing workers to still hear the environment around them. This type of hearing protection functions best in environments where workers need hearing protection but also to be able to hear warning signals or other workers. Workers wear earplugs or earmuffs for the majority of the workday or for extended periods of time, so it's imperative to choose a device that aligns with the environment and doesn't cause interruptions to the workflow.

Additionally, employers can further workplace compliance by considering the multi-functionality of safety headphones that allow for everyday use. Customizable features include comfort and fit; style options (earmuffs, earplugs or semi-aural/banded); Bluetooth technology (for music and phone calls); background noise-isolating microphone; and water-, sweat- and dust-resistant ratings.

By selecting innovative hearing protection that is best suited to the employer's specific work environments, you'll not only move one step closer to full compliance but also reduce workers' chances of permanent hearing loss.