

Supervisors Safety Bulletin™ Training Toolbox



This training tool is included with your membership to Supervisors Safety Bulletin – the latest news, rules, updates and training tools for a safe company and a safer workforce.

Hearing safety – what you need to know

■ Protect your ears now so they'll last a lifetime!

The purpose of this session is to help minimize your risk of injury from workplace noises. You'll learn about the different types of hearing protection and how to use them.

Hang onto your hearing

People who are exposed to noise and don't protect their hearing will begin to lose it prematurely.

For example, the average 25-year-old carpenter has the same hearing as a 50-year-old person!

Types of protection

There are generally four types of protection for the ears: disposable foam plugs, reusable plugs, canal caps and earmuffs.

Each is explained more fully in the column to the left.

Your employer will decide which type of protection is best for the job you do.

But it's up to you to learn how hearing protection is used and to use it every time it's required.

You'll get used to wearing hearing protection much like you get used to wearing a new pair of shoes. Some shoes break in easily, others take a little more time to get used to.



Frequently asked questions

Will ear plugs poke my eardrums?

No. Most ear plugs are 3/4-inches long. Your eardrum is 1 1/4 inches deep. The plug is too short to reach the eardrum.

Will ear plugs cause an infection?

No. But be sure your hands are clean when you insert ear plugs.

Can I hear warning sounds?

Yes. Proper protection will reduce noise and warning sounds equally, so the warning should be audible.

Can we hear each other talk?

In most cases, yes. It will depend on the noise level and how far apart you are.

In some cases workers may need a communication headset/earmuff.

How long can I put up with a loud noise?

That's like asking how long can I stare at the sun without hurting my eyes!

Do you really want to try that? The safest thing

to do is wear hearing protection.

When is it too loud?

When you have to raise your voice to talk to someone at arm's length. If you leave a place and your ears are ringing, it was too loud.

WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

There are four common kinds of hearing protection. You may have to experiment to find the type that's right for you.

Expandable foam plugs:

Made of foam, these expand and conform to the shape of the ear canal.

Roll the plugs into a small, crease-free cylinder and simply place them in the ear.

Reusable plugs: These are pre-molded and often come in different sizes.

You don't have to roll these up, and you can wash them and reuse them.

Canal caps: These are growing in popularity. They look like reusable plugs on a plastic or metal band.

The band hangs around your neck and keeps the plugs nearby when you need them.

Earmuffs: These come in many different models.

They block noise by completely covering the entire ear. Some muffs are small. Others are very large so that even more sound-dampening material can be added.

Some even have electronic components built in to help people communicate.

Training Session Quiz

NAME _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

1 Ears, like muscles, can actually get stronger if you expose them to noise for a period of time and then let them rest up.

true false

2 People who are exposed to loud noises and don't use protection will begin to lose their hearing prematurely.

true false

3 Holding your fingers over your ears is an acceptable method of reducing noise pollution in the workplace.

true false

4 It's up to you – and you alone – to decide which method of hearing protection is best for you because they're your ears.

true false

5 You'll get used to wearing hearing protection much like you get used to wearing a new pair of shoes. Some break in easily, others take a little more time.

true false

6 Workers should always be cautious when inserting earplugs because they can accidentally puncture the eardrum.

true false

7 Canal caps are a popular type of hearing protection that use plugs on the end of a plastic or metal band that hangs on the neck.

true false

8 A noise is too loud when you have to raise your voice to be heard at arms length, or your ears ring after leaving a noisy place.

true false

9 The advantage of reusable plugs is they are premolded to fit the ear and can be washed and used over again.

true false

10 Earmuffs come in many different models and sizes. Some can be fitted with electronic components to help improve communication between workers.

true false

ANSWERS

1. *False.* Ears do not get stronger. If you expose them to loud noises, your hearing will only get worse.
2. *True.* Continued exposure to loud noises will cause premature hearing loss.
3. *False.* OSHA does not recognize using your fingers as acceptable hearing protection. Instead, use foam or reusable plugs, canal caps or earmuffs.
4. *False.* Choosing hearing protection is a decision that must be made by the employee and the employer. Both play an important role in this critical process.
5. *True.* A good way to look at wearing hearing protection is like breaking in a new pair of shoes – sooner or later it'll feel comfortable. If not, try a different kind.
6. *False.* It's all but impossible to puncture the eardrum when inserting ear plugs because the plugs are much shorter than the ear canal.
7. *True.* The biggest advantage to canal caps is they are always nearby, so workers are more likely to slip them on when needed.
8. *True.* If you find yourself yelling to talk to someone beside you, it's too loud.
9. *True.* Reusable plugs can be washed and used again.
10. *True.* Earmuffs come in different models. Their ability to dampen noise depends on the model used.

OVER-HEARD AT WORK



"This noise used to bother me," the worker said to his boss. "But not anymore. My ears must be getting stronger."

"Nah, you're just going deaf like the rest of us," the boss replied.

It's true.

Ears don't get stronger. When you've been exposed to loud noise for an extended period, the noise bothers you less and less over time.

But that's only because your ears have been so damaged and beaten up by the sound that they don't work as well.