

### WHAT DID YOU SAY?

"My Dad wore a hearing aid, but he never seemed to have any trouble hearing me when I said something bad. He could *never* hear anything Mom said, no matter how loud she hollered at him. I guess her voice just didn't fall in the right frequency range. I'll guarantee you she had no trouble topping the decibel meter."

Noise-induced hearing loss is one of the most common occupational illnesses. It is often ignored because you can't see it, it usually develops over a long period of time, and, except in very rare cases, there is no pain. What does occur is a progressive loss of communication, socialization, and responsiveness to the environment.

Let's talk about the areas in our operation where hearing protection must be worn. What are they? (Some examples might be shredders, balers, compactors, grinders, cutting torches, and chop saws.) Is hearing protection available to every worker in these areas? Is it worn?

For a very cool noise level demonstration, go to:

[http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/noise/about/np/nisemeter\\_flash/soundMeter\\_flash.html](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/noise/about/np/nisemeter_flash/soundMeter_flash.html)

Click on the sound you want to hear. The noise meter will show you the decibel readings for various tools and equipment.

The OSHA standard requires hearing protection for employees whose daily average noise exposures are 85 dBA or above. The National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health (NIOSH) recommends requiring hearing protection device use if noises equal or exceed 85 dBA **regardless of exposure time**. In other words, use those earplugs even if you're in the noise just for a little while, because lots of little whiles can add up to a big exposure of noise.

**Note: Noise level measurements should be taken in your operation to determine noise exposure levels.**

Many types of hearing protection are available and can be suited to the worker as well as the workplace. They include expandable foam plugs, pre-molded reusable plugs, canal caps (the kind with a band that goes over or behind your head), earmuffs, and others. For a video demonstration of how to properly wear earplugs, go to:

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/mining/products/product88.htm>

Noise Reduction Rating (NRR) is the number on the hearing protector package that represents the amount of noise the device can actually suppress. NIOSH recommends the following reduction of NRR value based in part on the way we wear hearing protectors:

- Earmuffs, Subtract 25% from the manufacturer's labeled NRR
- Formable earplugs, Subtract 50% from the manufacturer's labeled NRR
- All other earplugs, Subtract 70% from the manufacturer's labeled NRR

Take care of your hearing while you're young, so you can hear your kids' and grandkids' laughter when you're old. They'll be glad you worked . . .

### SAFELY, OR NOT AT ALL.

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