**HEARING CONSERVATION PROGRAM**

OSHA stands for Occupational Safety and Health Administration. They require your employer to have a Hearing Conservation Program for any worker who is exposed to noise that is loud enough to damage hearing. **The noise level that can cause damage is:**

* **85 dBA, or**
* **A dose of 50%**

This amount of noise is called the “Action Level” and can damage your hearing over time. You may not know exactly how loud the noise is but if you have to yell to be heard by someone close to you, then the noise is probably loud enough to damage your hearing. A Hearing Conservation Program consists of hearing testing and training every year and gives you hearing protection at no cost. This handout is the training portion of the program.

**EFFECTS OF NOISE ON HEARING**

The first time you are exposed to a loud noise, you might lose your hearing for a little while, but your hearing will usually get better. Over time, noise can cause your hearing to change permanently. **Noise causes hearing loss in the high frequencies**, like birds and whistles, but can spread into lower frequencies too making it hard to hear people talking.

Noise can make you feel tired, irritable, and can cause health problems like high blood pressure and increased heart rate. It can even affect how well you do your job. If your ears are ringing after working in noise, this is also a sign that your hearing might be getting worse. If you have noises in your ears like ringing or buzzing sounds, this is called “Tinnitus” and may be a sign of being around too much noise or maybe even a sign of hearing loss.

**HEARING TESTING**

Hearing testing will let you know if you have good hearing or bad hearing. It also helps your employer to know if you are being protected from noise. You will listen for very soft beeping sounds and push a button when you hear them. It is very important to respond even if you barely hear the sounds. This is called your hearing “threshold”. **There are seven different tones from low pitch to high pitch that you will listen for in each ear.** The results will be explained to you after your test is done.

Hearing can get worse as you get older. This is called “presbycusis” and just means “old ears”. Noise can make your ears age much faster than normal. That is why it is so important to protect your hearing.

**The first time your employer tests your hearing is called your “baseline” test** and should be done before you have been around any noise. Then each year you have a hearing test, your results are compared to the baseline to see if there was a significant change. The hearing test can be done any time during your work day, even if you have been working in noise all day. Just make sure you are always wearing the right kind of hearing protection.

**HEARING PROTECTION**

Hearing protection will help to protect your ears from damage. **The inner ear is the where the organ of hearing is found.** This inner ear is called the “cochlea” and is what is damaged by noise over time. You can also have damage to the bones in your middle ear or even your eardrum with sudden loud sounds.

You might be asking yourself, “What is the right kind of hearing protection?” This depends on the kind of job you are doing and how loud the noise is around you. You might like to use earplugs that fit inside your ears or earmuffs that fit over your ears. Just remember, the best kind of hearing protection is the kind that is comfortable and that you will use every day. For good protection, earplugs should fit tightly in your ears and ear muffs should fit snugly around your ears. If you have questions about what kind of hearing protection to use, ask the person at your work who is in charge of safety.

**ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES OF HEARING PROTECTORS**

Advantages of earplugs are:

* **Small and easy to carry**
* Comfortable to wear all day even in hot weather

Disadvantages of earplugs are:

* **They may be difficult to fit in your ears**
* They can get dirty easily

Advantages of earmuffs are:

* One size fits all
* **Easy to see**
* Easy to find if lost

Disadvantage of earmuffs are:

* **More expensive to buy**
* Bulky and uncomfortable in hot weather
* Not easy to carry

**REMEMBER…**

**NOISE CAN CAUSE HEARING LOSS OVER TIME!**

**ONLY YOU CAN PROTECT YOUR HEARING!**