

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

The National Hearing Conservation Association (NHCA) strongly supports preserving and strengthening the functions and responsibilities of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

NIOSH serves an important mission by supporting, through extramural grants, independent research and technology development. These are activities that do not compete for resources with government compliance activities. NIOSH also supports training programs at academic institutions (Education Resource Centers) and develops recommendations for occupational health standards.

NIOSH has had significant impact on hearing conservation regulation. NIOSH began survey work in the 1960's. The analysis of this initial work led to the development of hearing risk criteria due to noise exposure in 1971. As early as 1972, NIOSH published the "Criteria for a Recommended Standard Occupational Exposure to Noise." In 1989, NIOSH was the first to study the combined effects of noise and solvents. Results of these studies were first presented at the NHCA meeting in San Diego in 1989. Over the years, NIOSH has been a resource on noise and hearing loss prevention to OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), MSHA (Mine Safety and Health Administration), and the world-wide hearing conservation community.

In 1995, NIOSH is studying the impact of impulse noise on hearing, alone and in combination with continuous noise, as well as the effects of noise and solvents. NIOSH is revising the noise criteria document which upon completion will go to OSHA as they consider changes in the Hearing Conservation Amendment, and to MSHA as they consider developing hearing conservation guidelines for miners. NIOSH recently published the Hearing Protector Compendium and will soon publish a revised edition to the original Practical Guide to Hearing Conservation (first printed in 1990).

NIOSH maintains a literature database cataloging research on noise and hearing conservation programs. NHCA publishes segments of the database as a regular feature of its quarterly newsletter, Spectrum. This literature database is used hundreds of times a year by researchers, scientists, academicians and practitioners seeking a comprehensive list of citations in a specific area.

In hearing conservation and hearing research, NIOSH has been a ground breaker, promoter, facilitator and educator. Reducing the strength of NIOSH by widespread budget reductions inappropriately handicaps an organization vital to a national goal, established in 1970, of guaranteed worker safety and health. The elimination of NIOSH and/or its functions would be a major loss to industry, labor, the diverse group of professionals in NHCA, and the worldwide professional community concerned with the hearing health of workers.

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