

CSDA Best Practice for Sawing and Drilling Operations

Title: Hearing Conservation

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Noise exposure is widely recognized as a commonplace hazard in sawing and drilling operations. The big issue is that on any given day, the noise level will vary from one jobsite to another. Using a task-based approach is a responsible and realistic solution for hearing conservation. Although noise-induced hearing loss is one of the most common occupational health concerns, it is often ignored because there are no visible effects. The loss of hearing can result in a progressive loss of communication, socialization and responsiveness to the environment.

Employers:

OSHA requires employers to implement hearing conservation programs and monitor noise exposure levels in a way that accurately identifies employees exposed to noise at or above 85 decibels (dB) averaged over 8 working hours, or an 8-hour time-weighted average. The following points will assist a cutting contractor to implement a hearing conservation program.

1. Training should be provided to each employee who is exposed to noise at or above an 8-hour time weighted average of 85 decibels in accordance with OSHA requirements (29 CFR 1910.95).
2. The employer should institute a training program and ensure employee participation in the program. The training program should be repeated annually for each employee included in the hearing conservation program. Information provided in the training program should be updated to be consistent with changes in protective equipment and work processes.
3. The employer should ensure that each employee is informed of the effects of noise on hearing and the purpose of hearing protectors. Employers should also explain the advantages, disadvantages and attenuation of various types of hearing protection, and provide instruction on the selection, fitting, use, and care of this equipment. In addition, the purpose of audiometric testing and an explanation of the test procedures should also be provided.
4. Conduct noise assessments on all sawing and drilling equipment. This information will be the basis for the requirement and selection of hearing protection for employees in the program. Employers shall offer two types of hearing protection to employees: ear plugs and ear muffs. Employers must provide hearing protection PPE at no cost to employees. Historical data from manufacturers or sources may be used.
5. If feasible, use engineering and administrative controls to reduce exposure.

Employees:

Hearing loss happens over a long period of time and may not even be noticed until the damage is done. Hearing loss can affect a person's ability to understand or discriminate speech. As it progresses, it can affect their ability to hear sounds in general. Noise can also cause harm to a person through stress, muscle tension, ulcers, increased blood pressure and hypertension.

1. Understand the purpose of hearing protectors when sawing and drilling, the advantage of various types and instructions on selection, fit, use and care.
2. Understand the affects of noise on hearing.
3. Know the noise level of the equipment being used. This should be confirmed by the employer.
4. Know the action level for noise exposure for an 8-hour time-weighted average is 85dBA. This information can be acquired from the employer or safety supervisor.
5. In extremely high noise level areas, dual hearing protection such as ear plugs under an ear muff may be necessary.
6. Personal activities such as, but not limited to, shooting guns, riding motorcycles, loud music, concerts, etc. can be a cause of hearing loss.
7. When necessary, always wear appropriate hearing protection. Hearing protection should be part of your standard PPE while cutting concrete.
8. Know and understand the purpose of audiometric testing and access to information on all test results. This should be explained by an employer or safety supervisor.