



Press Release – For Immediate Release

NHCA Responds To OSHA's Withdrawal of Their Proposed Noise Control Interpretation

Westminster, Colo. – January 25, 2011 – On October 19, 2010, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) published a proposal to revise the interpretation of the noise standard. The revised interpretation would require noise control (administrative or engineering), where economically and technologically feasible, for work environments which expose employees to or above the permissible exposure limit of 90 dBA (eight hour time-weighted average). The basis for this initiative was the continuing occurrence of permanent, significant hearing loss in employees; the Bureau of Labor Statistics has reported 125,000 such cases since 2004. The National Hearing Conservation Association (NHCA) supported OSHA's proposed interpretation as a significant step forward in reducing the incidence of work-induced hearing loss and other health conditions related to excessive noise exposure.

In response to feedback from manufacturers and their associations, legislators' comments, and an executive order advising federal agencies to be mindful of the impact of regulations on economic growth, OSHA withdrew its proposed interpretation of economic feasibility. In a recent news release dated January 19, 2011, Dr. David Michaels, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health, indicated that OSHA was still committed to the goal of reducing the incidence of work-related hearing loss; they were suspending work on this policy modification to study other approaches, such as greater outreach, compliance assistance, and additional stakeholder meetings to elicit input from manufacturers, as well as safety and health professionals.

While hearing conservation strategies such as education and effective, consistent use of personal hearing protection help to reduce the risk of injury from this hazard, they are meant to supplement, not replace, hazard abatement. Noise control is a crucial component of hearing loss prevention, and should be recognized as a primary strategy for effectively reducing the amount of noise exposure in the work environment.

NHCA continues to support OSHA's efforts to comply with its Congressional mandate; to ensure safe and healthy working conditions for employees through the provision and enforcement of effective safety standards. While disappointed by the recent events, we are encouraged by Dr. Michaels' confirmation that OSHA is not abandoning the cause of abating this pervasive workplace hazard. It is our hope that OSHA will continue to address the concerns surrounding noise control, and to emphasize the critical role it plays in preventing occupational noise-induced hearing loss.

About the National Hearing Conservation Association (NHCA)

The mission of the NHCA is to prevent hearing loss due to noise and other environmental factors in all sectors of society. NHCA's membership includes audiologists, industrial hygienists, physicians and occupational health nurses, educators, researchers, professional service organizations, safety professionals, engineers, audio professionals, students, and others who have dedicated their work to the advancement of hearing loss prevention.

For more information about the National Hearing Conservation Association, visit the NHCA online at <http://www.hearingconservation.org> or call 1-303-224-9022. Follow the NHCA on Twitter at www.twitter.com/nhcaorg, on Facebook at <http://bit.ly/vLRg5>, and on LinkedIn at <http://bit.ly/3X2DfT>.

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