



# Trade Release

U.S. Department of Labor  
Occupational Safety and Health Administration  
Office of Communications  
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[www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)

For Immediate Release  
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## **OSHA seeks comments on its official interpretation of workplace noise exposure controls**

WASHINGTON – OSHA is proposing to issue an [interpretation](#) of the term “feasible administrative or engineering controls” as used in the general industry and construction [occupational noise exposure standards](#) and to amend its current enforcement policy to reflect the interpretation. For the purpose of enforcing compliance with these standards, the proposal states that “feasible” has its ordinary meaning of capable of being done.

OSHA’s noise standards specify that feasible administrative or engineering controls must be used to reduce noise to acceptable levels and that personal protective equipment, such as ear plugs and ear muffs, must be used only as supplements when administrative or engineering controls are not completely effective. The preference for engineering and administrative controls over personal protective equipment is consistent with the approach taken in all of OSHA’s health standards and reflects the fact that such controls are generally more effective. Under the agency’s current enforcement policy, however, the agency issues citations for failure to use engineering and administrative controls only when they cost less than a hearing conservation program or such equipment is ineffective.

OSHA today proposes to interpret the term “feasible” in conformity with its ordinary meaning and with the safety and health purposes of the OSH Act. The Supreme Court has held that the term “feasible” as used in the standard-setting provision of the Occupational Safety and Health Act means capable of being done. The proposal aligns the interpretation of the noise standard with the Court’s holding and with OSHA’s other standards that require feasible engineering controls. The Agency intends to change its noise enforcement policy to authorize issuing citations requiring the use of administrative and engineering controls when feasible as indicated in the interpretation described in the FR notice.

Every year, approximately 30 million workers are exposed to hazardous noise that is often ignored because the harmful effects of overexposure are typically not visible and develop over an extended period of time. Workers exposed to high noise levels can develop elevated blood pressure, ringing in the ears or permanent hearing loss.

Comments on the interpretation must be submitted on or before Dec. 20, 2010. Submit comments at <http://www.regulations.gov>. Individuals who mail or deliver comments must submit three copies to the OSHA Docket Office, Docket No. OSHA-2010-0032, U.S. Department of Labor, Room N-2625, 200 Constitution Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20210. Submissions not longer than 10 pages may be faxed to 202-693-1648.

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA’s role is to assure these conditions for America’s working men and women by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education and assistance. For more information, visit <http://www.osha.gov>.

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