CompWest
WORKERS' COMPENSATION WITH CARE™

LOSS CONTROL GUIDE

Loss Control: Activities to Prevent Accidents or Reduce the Cost of Accidents in the Workplace

Hearing Conservation Program Overview

General Requirements

An employer must have in place an effective hearing conservation program whenever employee noise exposures equal or exceed an 8-hour TIME WEIGHTED Average (TWA) of 85 decibels measured on the A-scale (85 dBA). A TWA of 85 dBA corresponds to a noise dose of 50%, also called the action level.

Employers must provide protection against the harmful affects of noise when employees are exposed to excessive noise levels (exceeding the TWA of 85 dBA) on the job. If you must raise your voice or shout to be heard above the noise in the workplace, this rule may apply. The following is a summary of the major sections of the rules.

Noise Monitoring

Conduct noise monitoring; include all employees affected by noise exceeding 85 dBA, TWA. Noise dosimetry is a method used to measure noise exposure. Not all employees need to be sampled; however, the noise monitoring must be representative of each affected employee's job. The monitoring should be designed to identify employees for inclusion in a Hearing Conservation Program. All employees must be notified of noise monitoring results that exceed 85 dBA, TWA.

Noise Controls

If noise levels exceed a TWA of 90 dBA, all feasible must be taken to reduce the noise exposure of employees to below 90 dBA. Whenever feasible engineering, administrative, or work-practice controls can be instituted, although insufficient to reduce exposure below the PEL, they shall be required in conjunction with personal protective equipment (PPE) to reduce exposure to the lowest practical level.

A Hearing Conservation Program

Must be implemented for all employees exposed to noise levels above TWA of 85 dBA. These five basic components comprise an effective Hearing Conservation Program:

- Exposure Monitoring
- Audiometric Testing
- Hearing Protection
- Employee Training
- Recordkeeping

Audiometric Testing

Establish and maintain an annual testing program if results from the initial monitoring equal or exceed a TWA of 85 dBA.

Baseline audiograms are required within six months from the date of the employee's first exposure to noise above 85 dBA. Subsequent audiograms are compared to the baseline audiogram to determine hearing loss. Audiometric tests must be performed and the audiogram evaluated by a licensed or certified audiologist, otolaryngologist, or other physician, or by a certified CAOHC technician.

Before testing employees, advise them to avoid activities that expose them to high levels of noise and to avoid non-occupational exposure (or use hearing protection) within the 14 hours prior to the test.

Compare the employee's annual audiogram to the baseline audiogram. If the comparison shows a standard threshold shift, the employer must either accept the results or retest the employee within 30 days.

Repeat the hearing test annually for all employee exposure over 85 dBA.

Follow-up Procedures

Within 21 days of receiving the report, notify, in writing, each employee whose audiogram shows a standard threshold shift. Employees with a documented hearing loss must be fitted with hearing protectors, trained in their use and care, and required to use them. Employees who are already using hearing protectors must be refitted and retrained. Some employees may need to be referred to a qualified specialist for additional evaluation.