Hearing Conservation Program

To help protect employee hearing, UAA has established a hearing conservation program. The program includes sound surveys, noise controls, hearing protection, and education.

Sound Surveys

Sound surveys are used to identify work location where hazardous noise levels exist. Employee exposures to noise are monitored periodically with a sound level meter. Contact EHS/RMS if an area or operation is suspected to have associated sound hazards.

Noise Controls

When possible, noise will be reduced or eliminated by modifying existing machinery and placing noise limit specification on new equipment. Personnel can help by maintaining equipment in good operation, properly using noise controls when installed, and reporting noisy equipment to supervision when it needs attention.

Hearing Protection

Hearing protectors can be very effective but only if they fit properly and are worn correctly. Although labeled Noise Reduction Ratings (NRRs) typically range from 20-30 decibels, in practice the protection that normally can be achieved is about 10-20 decibels. The more carefully a person selects and wears hearing protectors, the higher the protection will be. There are several types of ear protectors. Each can be effective but some require frequent, careful cleaning and others have a fairly short useful life. The types of protectors include:

- Formable Plugs
- Pre-molded Plugs
- Semi-aural Devices
- Earmuffs

Fitting Tip

When either a plug or muff is properly fitted, the sound of a person’s own voice should change, becoming deeper, hollow, or muffled. If the change isn’t heard, or if it isn’t the same in both ears, a proper fit and acoustic seal has not been obtained in either one or both ears.

Use of Radios And MP3 Players

Use of entertainment devices with or without hearing protection impedes the users’ ability to react to emergency situations that may arise during the course of their duties. Therefore, these types are highly discouraged if not actually prohibited during most work activities where their use is determined to be inappropriate. EHS will assist supervisors with making these types of determinations.
Hearing protection must be worn when there is a possibility of hearing damage. This occurs when there is continuous exposure to certain noise levels or exposure to loud impulse or impact noise. The current permissible exposure level (PEL) and action level (for increased monitoring and evaluation) for noise is an average noise level of 85db (decibels) for a duration of eight hours. A rule of thumb is that if normal conversation can be understood about two feet away, the noise level is probably less than 90db. Proper protection is required when employees are exposed to noise of 90db for over 2 hours or 105db for over 1 hour. Employees working under these conditions will be furnished with and required to wear personal protective equipment when directed by their supervisor.

Specific areas where the noise level is regularly above 90db must be identified by signs and time limits.

Employees who are exposed to frequent noise levels above 90db are required to obtain periodic hearing evaluations from the University’s contract physician. Current audiogram readings are then compared against past results. If changes appear to be noise-related, different hearing protectors may be needed, retraining personnel on their use, or recommend that personnel wear them during off-the-job exposures. OSHA required hearing evaluations are provided at no charge to employees and departments and are funded by the Statewide Office of Risk Services.

Contact EHS/RMS for further information.