**P.3. Hearing Conservation**

1. Purpose: The purpose of this program element is to establish programs that reduce or eliminate the level of noise in the work environment to safe levels through engineering controls, administrative controls, and/or personal protective equipment and any physical or environmental hazards to employees’ eyes. Methods may include personal protective equipment (ear plugs, ear muffs, safety glasses, goggles, and face shields), points of operation equipment guards, non-hazardous tools, proper illumination, and other similar engineering controls.
2. Introduction: This directive contains requirements for the assessment of hazards to sight and hearing and detail regarding necessary control methods when these hazards may be present. Protection methods (presented in the order of desirability from most to least) may include engineering controls (elimination, enclosure, or substitution of hazard sources with less hazardous ones), personal protective equipment (safety glasses, goggles, face shields, and/or hearing protection), or administrative controls (reducing length and/or severity of exposure).
3. Procedure Elements:
   1. Hazard Assessment: Conduct and document an assessment to identify and determine if a Hearing Conservation program and written policy/procedure are needed.
4. The assessment should identify areas and operations where noise levels may pose a risk to employees and exceed the action levels as defined by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).
5. Conduct area or personal noise level monitoring to identify the need for engineering, administrative, and/or hearing protection controls.
6. Employees exposed to noise levels that equal or exceed 85 dBA on an 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA) basis shall be included in a Hearing Conservation Program.
7. Employees exposed to noise levels that equal or exceed 90 dBA on an 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA) basis shall be required to use hearing protection assuming the exposure cannot be reduced through engineering controls.
8. Applicable Standards: Several standards and regulations pertain to hearing conservation and protective equipment. The following list includes several of the possible organizations and standards that may apply, but it is not inclusive.
9. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Standards.
10. OSHA 29 CFR 1910.95 – Occupational Noise Exposure (including appendix A. through I.).
11. ANSI (American National Standards Institute).
12. ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials).
13. Written Procedure: Develop a written policy/procedure to address the Hearing Conservation program. The policy/procedure should address the following areas:
14. Define and assign program roles and responsibilities.
    1. Initial and periodic evaluation of noise exposures to employees.
    2. Selection and purchase of hearing protection.
    3. Scheduling and tracking of audiometric testing.
    4. Scheduling and providing training for all employees who are exposed to noise at or above an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels.
    5. Ensuring and enforcing the proper usage of hearing protection.
    6. Evaluation of program effectiveness and periodic inspections.
    7. Recordkeeping.
15. Develop procedures for noise exposure evaluation and periodic monitoring.
16. Perform initial evaluation and testing.
17. Reassess when changes in production, process, equipment or controls increase noise exposures to additional employees at or above the action level.
18. Reassess when the hearing protection being used is no longer adequate to reduce noise levels to acceptable levels.
19. List all locations, operations, occupations, and/or employees that are included in the agency’s hearing conservation program.
20. Develop procedures for baseline and annual audiometric testing.
21. Audiometric testing for all employees whose exposures equal or exceed an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels.
22. Establish a baseline within 6 months of an employee's first exposure at or above the action level.
23. Annually for as long as the employee is exposed to noise levels at or above the action level.
24. At the time of reassignment out of the area where employees are exposed to noise levels at or above the action level.
25. At the time of termination of employment.
26. An evaluation of the annual audiogram shall be conducted to identify possible hearing loss beyond the standard threshold shift.
27. List the qualified medical organization or company that is contracted to conduct and evaluate the audiometric examinations.
28. Develop procedures for noise level controls and the proper use of hearing protection.
29. When employees are subjected to sound exceeding the established OSHA limits, feasible engineering or administrative controls shall be utilized. If such controls fail to reduce sound levels to an acceptable level, hearing protection shall be required and provided to employees.
30. Provide various (i.e., at least two) types of hearing protection devices to employees.
31. Areas requiring hearing protection should have signs posted to identify high noise level areas and the need for personal protection.
32. Develop procedures for recordkeeping.
33. Program assessments or evaluations.
34. Noise exposure measurement records shall be retained for two years.
35. Employee training records (three years).
36. Audiometric testing records hall be retained for the duration of the affected employee's employment.
37. Training: Develop content and frequency for employee training.
    * 1. Define the initial training or orientation process for new employees working in the defined areas.
      2. The training program shall be repeated annually for each employee included in the hearing conservation program. Information provided in the training program shall be updated to be consistent with changes in protective equipment and work processes.
      3. The effects of noise on hearing.
      4. The purpose of hearing protectors, the advantages, disadvantages, and attenuation of various types.
      5. Instructions on proper selection, fitting, use, and care (regular inspections, cleaning, sanitation, and proper storage).
      6. The purpose of audiometric testing, and an explanation of the test procedures.
38. Checklists and Forms: There may be the need to provide and/or develop checklists and/or forms to assist with the evaluation of needs for this program.
39. Program Effectiveness Review and Response: The effectiveness of this program in preventing workplace injuries and illnesses should be evaluated at least annually with appropriate actions taken to address any program deficiencies found.