Now Hear This!



Safety Talk

Too much noise can cause permanent hearing loss. It develops gradually and without pain, but noise-induced hearing loss cannot be reversed.

You can halt it, though, if you protect your ears from further exposure. If your hearing is starting to fade, do something about it now so it does not get worse. And if your hearing hasn't been damaged, keep it that way.

Two types of noise damage the hearing. One is a sudden loud noise, such as an explosion or a gunshot. Permanent hearing loss can happen instantly.

More common, though, is gradual damage from noise. Conveyors, air tools and heavy equipment are among the countless sources of workplace noise.

If the noise problem can't be corrected by measures such as sound insulation and machinery maintenance, then you have to wear hearing protection. The protection you choose will depend on your work situation. You may need disposable foam earplugs or molded plastic canal caps. Or earmuffs may be required.

Regular hearing tests are usually provided for people who work in noisy environments. A baseline test is done first, then subsequent tests later to see if your hearing has deteriorated since the baseline test.

There's no substitute for a real hearing test, but take this quiz to learn if your hearing is in jeopardy:

- Does it seem as though everyone mumbles and you often have to ask people to repeat themselves?
- Do you often misunderstand what others say?
- Do you have trouble picking out sounds from a noisy background? For example, is it hard to follow what one person is saying in a room where others are talking?
- Do others complain that you play the television or talk too loudly?
- Is it harder for you to hear things when you first leave work, with your hearing returning to normal a few hours later?
- Is it difficult for you to hear on the telephone?
- Do you have trouble hearing certain tones, such as high notes in music or a high-pitched voice?
- Do you get confused about where a sound is coming from?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you might be developing hearing loss.

Hearing protection will help prevent further damage.

But hearing protection only works if you use it. The inconvenience of wearing earplugs or earmuffs temporarily is nothing compared to the inability to hear for the rest of your life.