



HEARING LOSS IS PREVENTABLE

Consider the following when managing hazardous noise in your workplace:

1. Noise induced hearing loss (NIHL) happens gradually—the damage causing hearing loss increases over time through a series of repeated exposures. Many people don't realise they have noise induced hearing loss until it is too late.

- At first, most people aren't aware of any change in their hearing but, over time, it becomes more noticeable. For example, a worker may have difficulty hearing what family and co-workers say clearly or hearing sounds that are necessary for working safely, like important verbal instructions such as warning signals.
- The first indication that a worker may be exposed to hazardous noise levels is a temporary injury known as Temporary Threshold Shift, which is temporary hearing loss. Hearing may be restored after spending time away from noise.
- The effects of NIHL can take some years to be noticed.

2. Understand the signs of exposure to hazardous noise. Consider the below scenarios that may indicate you are exposed to excessive noise in the workplace:

- A person has to raise their voice to talk to someone one metre away.
- The radio is very loud during breaks, or when equipment is not being used.
- The radio in your vehicle does not sound as loud as it was when you drove to work in the morning. This is a sign that temporary threshold shift has occurred during the work day. The change in hearing threshold is experienced as dull or blocked hearing and sometimes ringing in the ears (tinnitus). This may last from hours to days after the exposure.

3. Hearing protection isn't the best way. Manage noise effectively by recognising, and focusing on the various sources associated with the risk.

- Buy the quietest plant and machinery for the job, or consider an alternative—and always ask the manufacturer or supplier for information about noise levels. For example, electric instead of petrol motors.

- Understanding the hierarchy of controls will assist in recognising all potential sources of risk.
 - **Eliminate** Minimise the risk. Have you got the right machine for the job?
 - **Substitute** Consider buying quieter equipment. Is there another way to do the job?
 - **Isolate** Isolate the source of the noise by enclosing it or distancing it from workers.
 - **Engineer** Reduce noise levels at the source. For example, change speeds, turn down the volume, fit silencers.
 - **Admin** Reduce exposure levels. Restrict or limit access to noisy areas.
 - **PPE** Is the right type and level of hearing protection being used? Only used PPE as a last resort to manage residual noise.

4. Talk to your Supervisor about noisy equipment.

- Employers, businesses and other PCBUs must effectively manage the risks associated with exposure to hazardous noise to protect workers and eliminate the risk of hearing loss, both gradual and immediate and any associated tinnitus.
- This leads to a less stressful and more productive work environment.

5. Ensure you are communicating with employees to monitor and review conditions. Management can't deal with it unless the workers tell them about it.

- Conduct a walk-through assessment of the workplace.
- Observe the plant, equipment and work being undertaken. Talk to workers about how work is carried out and asking about any problems they may have.
- Inspect the plant and equipment used during work activities.
- Talk to your relevant stakeholders—manufacturers, suppliers, industry associations, health and safety specialists and professionals.
- Review any incidents and monitor reports.

Talk to SafeWork NSW about how to manage noise
on 13 10 50 or visit safework.nsw.gov.au

