

PPE: Noise

PAYmasters

Construction sites are noisy places, especially during certain phases of a project. However, you don't have to accept hearing loss as a cost of working at construction sites. Noise is now recognized by OSHA as a hazard that can cause:

- *Temporary or permanent hearing loss.*
- *Drowsiness, irritability, & loss of concentration.*
- *Decreased morale and stress.*
- *High blood pressure, ulcers, headaches, and sleeping disorders.*

There is no cure for noise-induced hearing loss, so preventing exposure to excessive noise is the only way to avoid hearing damage and other hazards. *Noise* is unwanted sound measured by its frequency (high or low pitch and its intensity (loudness measured in decibels (dB)). High frequencies are most damaging. Construction workers may not be exposed to more than an average of 85 dB over an eight-hour period without hearing protection being provided.

Hearing protection devices (HPDs) do not block out sound completely, but they give some protection by reducing the amount of sound reaching your ear. At the same time, you will be able to hear speech and important machinery sounds.

Keep in mind, though, that HPDs are provided only after your employer assesses the noise, attempts to reduce it using engineering and administrative controls (like having you work far from noisy equipment, limiting the amount of time you spend in noisy environments, and installing antivibration machine mountings or acoustical enclosures), and then finds that hazardous noise remains. The various HPDs that your company may provide to you include ear plugs, ear muffs, or canal caps.

Ultimately, you are responsible for protecting your own hearing. Here are some points to remember about protecting your sense of hearing:

- Have an annual hearing test.
- Make sure your hearing protection fits.
- Don't use homemade hearing protection devices; they don't work.

