

Purpose:

Conservation of hearing is an important preventative measure. To reduce occupational hearing loss, Town Employees who work areas where the noise levels have been recorded above the 85db time-weighted average will take part in annual hearing testing, including a baseline. Compliance with this program is intended to meet the relevant standards as set forth in OSHA's regulation 29 CFR 1910.95.

Responsibilities:

Following appropriate Noise Exposure Surveys conducted within the Fire, Parks and Recreation and Public Works Departments; the Town has implemented the following responsibilities:

Department Heads: The Department Heads in the designated areas will be responsible for the following:

- Use of Engineering and Administrative controls to limit employee exposure
- Provision of adequate hearing protection for employees
- Posting signs and warnings for all high noise areas
- Conduct of noise surveys annually or when new equipment is added
- Conduct of initial and annual hearing tests for all employees to establish a baseline and determine thresholds. (Note: Tests are provided at no cost to the employees.)
- Conduct of hearing conservation training for all new employees
- Conduct of annual hearing conservation training for all employees
- Making copies of the OSHA Standard available to employees and posting a copy in the workplace

Department Heads in other areas will conduct job task hazard assessments to determine potential noise hazards, which do not meet the requirement for a full Hearing Conservation Program, and will implement notification, personal protective equipment, and training for their staff.

Employees: Employees who are assigned duties in high noise areas will be responsible for the following actions:

- Use of Department-provided/approved hearing protection in designated high noise areas
- Request new hearing protection when needed
- Exercise proper care of issued hearing protection
- Inspect and maintain their provided hearing protection to ensure the integrity of the device is maintained.

Training:

At time of hire and annually thereafter, all Employees in identified noise hazard areas must attend Hearing Conservation Training. The initial training is conducted by the Department Heads or their designated representative and will consist of the following:

- Rules and procedures
- Identification of job duties and/or use of equipment which will require hearing protection
- The purpose of hearing protectors, the advantages, disadvantages, and attenuation of various types, and instructions on selection, fitting, use, and care.
- How noise affects hearing and hearing loss
- The purpose of audiometric testing and an explanation of the procedures
- This training will be documented, including an outline of the topics covered, and records will be maintained in the employee's training files.

Access to information and training materials: The Town will make available to affected employees or their representatives copies of the OSHA standard 1910.95 and will post a copy of the standard in each workplace where the program is required.

Engineering Controls:

After it is determined that a noise exposure at or above an eight (8) hour time rated average of 85 dB is present, engineering controls should be evaluated and implemented to reduce the noise exposure before administrative controls are initiated. Some examples of engineering controls include:

- Noise reducing baffles
- Compartmentalization
- Installing noise reducing gears
- Installing rubber pads under machinery

When new equipment or machinery is evaluated for purchase, the respective Safety Committee Member and pertinent Department Head will consult with other parties as needed in order to conduct an evaluation from a safety and health standpoint. One criteria of the evaluation should include the amount of noise the equipment will produce and how it will affect the overall noise exposure.

Administrative Controls:

After engineering controls are evaluated for effectiveness or feasibility, administrative controls should be considered to reduce noise exposure. Administrative controls include restricting exposure time or using personal protective equipment (PPE).

Personal Protective Equipment, such as earplugs or muffs, may be used to reduce the amount of noise exposure. Each plug or muff has a noise reduction (NR) factor as evaluated by ANSI Standards (S3.19 - 1974 or Z24.22 - 1957). For example, if a work area has an ambient noise exposure of 96 dB(A), the hearing protectors should be rated 6 NR or better to be effective.

According to OSHA Regulations, each location with noise exposures of 85 to 89 dB(A) will provide hearing protectors for the Employee's optional use. Noise exposures at 90 dB(A) or above require the **mandatory** use of hearing protection. Further, OSHA requires that a variety of

hearing protectors be available for Employees to choose (both a variety of plug and muff type hearing protectors).

Use of Hearing Protectors:

The Town will make hearing protectors available to all employees exposed to an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 db or greater at no cost to the employees. Hearing protectors will be replaced as necessary. The following rules will be enforced:

- Hearing protectors will be available in a variety of styles for employees to choose which is most comfortable for them to wear.
- Hearing protectors and replacements will be provided free of charge.
- Hearing protection devices will be worn in all designated high noise areas.
- Employees do have the option to wear hearing protection in non-high noise areas if they feel it would provide them additional protection.
- The Town will ensure proper initial fitting and supervise the correct use of all hearing protectors.

Record Keeping:

- Records of exposure measurements will be retained by the Town for two years.
- Records of a baseline/initial audiogram and annual hearing tests will be retained by the Human Resources Department during the affected Employee's active employment and following departure from the Town's employ. All audiogram results will be maintained in the Employee's Medical file.
- Access to Records: All records required by this section shall be provided upon request to employees, former employees, representatives designated by the individual employee, and the Maine Bureau of Labor.

Audiometric Test Program and Requirements:

- The Town will establish an audiometric testing program for all employees whose exposures equal or exceed an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85db.
- The program will be provided at no cost to employees.
- Audiometric tests will be performed by a licensed or certified practitioner.
- A baseline audiogram will be performed within six months of an employee's first exposure at or above the action level.
- Testing to establish a baseline audiogram shall be preceded by at least 14 hours without exposure to workplace noise. Hearing protectors may be used as a substitute for the requirement that baseline audiograms be preceded by 14 hours without exposure to workplace noise.
- **Annual Audiogram:** At least annually after obtaining the baseline audiogram, the Town will obtain a new audiogram for each employee exposed at or above an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85db.

- The annual audiogram will be compared to the baseline audiogram to determine if there has been a standard threshold shift. If a shift has been noted, a repeat audiogram can be conducted within thirty days.
- If a shift is determined to have occurred, the Town will inform the employee of this fact in writing within 21 days.
- The employee will be re-fitted for hearing protection, retrained on correct usage, and offered hearing protection with greater attenuation if necessary. The employee may be referred to a specialist in hearing issues.