

COUNTY OF TUOLUMNE

HEARING CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Effective Date: **July 1, 1991**

Revised: **June 2001**

Policy

Cal OSHA law requires employers to provide a Hearing Conservation Program for all employees exposed to noise at or above 85 decibels, average over an 8-hour work day. It shall be the policy of all County departments to conduct appropriate surveys to determine the need for a Hearing conservation Program.

Sound Level Survey

1. As practical, all work areas shall be surveyed to determine the highest noise level. The results shall be recorded. This survey shall be repeated whenever a change in machinery/equipment, process or controls increases noise exposure.
2. Instruments used to measure employee noise exposure shall be calibrated to ensure measurement accuracy.
3. Mobile equipment and work areas that exceeds 90 dBA shall be thoroughly surveyed to noise source(s) and an area profile of those results recorded.
4. Copies of these surveys shall be forwarded to the department head, and the County Safety Officer.

Monitoring

Employees shall not be exposed to noise that exceeds the limits prescribed by law.

1. Each job function that has an exposure which exceeds an 8 hour time weighted average (TWA) sound level of 85 decibels will be documented. A representative employee of each job function can be monitored to meet this requirement.
2. Affected employees and/or their bargaining unit representatives shall be provided the opportunity to observe any testing, sampling or monitoring.

- a. They shall be notified of the date, time and place of testing in advance.
- b. They shall be allowed access to records of such monitoring results.
- c. Employees exposed to noise exceeding 90 dBA shall be advised in writing of such exposure and the corrective action to be taken by the County.

Methods of Compliance

1. Engineering Controls

Whenever the operations reasonably permit, employee exposure to noise 90 dBA shall be eliminated or at least reduced by engineering controls.

2. Administrative Controls

After exhausting all reasonable engineering controls, and whenever the operations reasonably permit, administrative controls shall be implemented to avoid or reduce the use of hearing protectors. This can be accomplished by rotating employees to work areas with low noise exposure.

Hearing Protectors

1. Hearing protectors may be worn to reduce employee exposure to noise where engineering or administrative controls are not reasonably feasible.
2. Each department shall publish a list of jobs that exceed 90 dBA and require those employees to wear hearing protection.
3. Each department shall establish a list of employees whose daily noise exposure exceeds 85 dBA and whose audiogram shows a significant threshold shift. Those employees shall be required to wear hearing protectors.
4. Hearing protectors used must have EPA and/or NIOSH noise reduction ratings (NRR) and provide adequate attenuation for the exposure. Acceptable hearing protective devices include ear plugs and ear muffs. Both are provided by the County at no cost to the employee.

5. Ear plugs requiring fitting shall be issued only by personnel who have been qualified as an audiometric technician or who have obtained documented instruction from a physician.
6. Hearing protectors that do not require fitting may be issued from the supervisor providing that employees have been instructed in their proper use.
7. Employees shall be trained in the proper maintenance and sanitation of hearing protectors.

Audiometric Testing

1. Employees exposed to noise dose exceeding 85 dBA shall be tested annually.
2. Audiometric tests shall be preceded by a period of at least 14 hours during which time there is no exposure to workplace sound levels in excess of 80 dBA. Hearing protectors may be worn to reduce noise levels below 80 dBA.
3. Each employee's subsequent audiogram shall be examined to determine if any improved hearing level or significant threshold shift in either ear has occurred relative to the referenced audiogram.
 - a. If a significant threshold shift is present, a retest shall be made available to the employee within 30 workdays.
 - b. If the shift persists in the retest, the test results shall be evaluated by an audiologist or a physician, and the employee shall be examined by a physician, if necessary, to determine the cause of the threshold shift.
 - 1) If the threshold shift appears to have a cause other than noise exposure, the employee shall be notified and referred to an appropriate source for medical care.
 - 2) If the threshold shift is stated to be noise-induced:

- a) Employees who have not used hearing protectors previously shall now be required to wear hearing protectors when exposed to 85 dBA or more.
 - b) Employees who have already been issued hearing protectors shall be retrained and reinstructed in the use of hearing protectors.
 - c) The employee shall be notified (within 21 days) in writing of the shift in hearing level, and this hearing level becomes the new reference audiogram.
 - d) This then becomes a recordable illness. Appropriate entry on *the* OSHA 200 log is required.
4. Audiometric testing shall be administered by a certified audiometric technician or reputable health service contractor. The contractor shall comply with any state or federal regulations as it pertains to methods of testing and calibration of equipment.

Training

1. A training program shall be provided for all employees who are exposed to noise at or above an 8 hour TWA of 85 dBA. Each department providing such training shall ensure that all exposed employees participate.
2. Training shall be repeated annually for each employee included in the hearing conservation program. Information provided during training shall be consistent with changes in protective equipment and work processes.
3. Departments shall ensure that each employee is informed of the following:
 - a. The effects of noise on hearing.
 - b. The purpose of hearing protectors, types provided and instruction on fitting and cleaning..
 - c. A review of the audiometric testing and the results received.

Record Keeping

1. Noise exposure measurement records shall be retained for 2 years.

2. Audiometric test records shall be retained for five years past the termination of affected employees.
3. Such records shall be made available to employees or their designated representatives.