

OSHA Regulation on Occupational Noise Exposure

29 CFR 1910.95 – Occupational Noise Exposure

(a) Protection against the effects of noise exposure shall be provided when the sound levels exceed those shown in Table G-16 when measured on the A scale of a standard sound level meter at slow response. When noise levels are determined by octave band analysis, the equivalent A-weighted sound level may be determined as follows:

FIGURE G-9

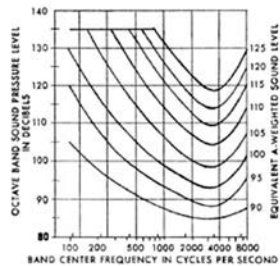


Figure G-9 – Equivalent sound level contours. Octave band sound pressure levels may be converted to the equivalent A-weighted sound level by plotting them on this graph and noting the A-weighted sound level corresponding to the point of highest penetration into the sound level contours. This equivalent A-weighted sound level, which may differ from the actual A-weighted sound level of the noise, is used to determine exposure limits from Table 1.G-16.

(b) (1) When employees are subjected to sound exceeding those listed in Table G-16, feasible administrative or engineering controls shall be utilized. If such controls fail to reduce sound levels within the levels of Table G-16, personal protective equipment shall be provided and used to reduce sound levels within the levels of the table. (b)(2) If the variations in noise level involve maxima at intervals of 1 second or less, it is to be considered continuous.

Table G-16 – Permissible Noise Exposures

Duration per day, hours	Sound level dBA slow response
8	90
6	92
4	95
3	97
2	100
1½	102
1	105
¾	110
½ or less	115

Table G-16 – When the daily noise exposure is composed of two or more periods of noise exposure of different levels, their combined effect should be considered, rather than the individual effect of each. If the sum of the following fractions: $C_1/T_1 + C_2/T_2 + \dots + C_n/T_n$ exceeds unity, then, the mixed exposure should be considered to exceed the limit value. C_n indicates the total time of exposure at a specified noise level, and T_n indicates the total time of exposure permitted at that level. Exposure to impulsive or impact noise should not exceed 140 dB peak sound pressure level.

Hearing Conservation Amendment

(c) **Hearing conservation program** (1) The employer shall administer a continuing, effective hearing conservation program, as described in paragraphs (c) through (o) of this section, whenever employee noise exposures equal or exceed an 8-hour time-weighted average sound level (TWA) of 85 decibels measured on the A scale (slow response) or, equivalently, a dose of fifty percent. For purposes of the hearing conservation program, employee noise exposures shall be computed in accordance with appendix A and Table G-16a, and without regard to any attenuation provided by the use of personal protective equipment.

(2) For purposes of paragraphs (c) through (n) of this section, an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels or a dose of fifty percent shall also be referred to as the action level.

(d) **Monitoring** (1) When information indicates that any employee's exposure may equal or exceed an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels, the employer shall develop and implement a monitoring program. (i) The sampling strategy shall be designed to identify employees for inclusion in the hearing conservation program and to enable the proper selection of hearing protectors. (ii) Where circumstances such as high worker mobility, significant variations in sound level, or a significant component of impulse noise make area monitoring generally inappropriate, the employer shall use representative personal sampling to comply with the monitoring requirements of this paragraph unless the employer can show that area sampling produces equivalent results.

(2)(i) All continuous, intermittent and impulsive sound levels from 80 decibels to 130 decibels shall be integrated into the noise measurements. (ii) Instruments used to measure employee noise exposure shall be calibrated to ensure measurement accuracy.

(3) Monitoring shall be repeated whenever a change in production, process, equipment or controls increases noise exposures to the extent that: (i) Additional employees may be exposed at or above the action level; or (ii) The attenuation provided by hearing protectors being used by employees may be rendered inadequate to meet the requirements of paragraph (j) of this section.

(e) **Employee notification** The employer shall notify each employee exposed at or above an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels of the results of the monitoring.

(f) **Observation of monitoring** The employer shall provide affected employees or their representatives with an opportunity to observe any noise measurements conducted pursuant to this section.

(g) **Audiometric testing program** (1) The employer shall establish and maintain an audiometric testing program as provided in this paragraph by making audiometric testing available to all employees whose exposures equal or exceed an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels.

(2) The program shall be provided at no cost to employees.

(3) Audiometric tests shall be performed by a licensed or certified audiologist, otolaryngologist, or other physician, or by a technician who is certified by the Council of Accreditation in Occupational Hearing Conservation, or who has satisfactorily demonstrated competence in administering audiometric examinations, obtaining valid audiograms, and properly using, maintaining and checking calibration and proper functioning of the audiometers being used. A technician who operates microprocessor audiometers does not need to be certified. A technician who performs audiometric tests must be responsible to an audiologist, otolaryngologist or physician.

(4) All audiograms obtained pursuant to this section shall meet the requirements of Appendix C: *Audiometric Measuring Instruments*.

(5) **Baseline audiogram.** (i) Within 6 months of an employee's first exposure at or above the action level, the employer shall establish a valid baseline audiogram against which subsequent audiograms can be compared.

(ii) **Mobile test van exception.** Where mobile test vans are used to meet the audiometric testing obligation, the employer shall obtain a valid baseline audiogram within 1 year of an employee's first exposure at or above the action level. Where baseline audiograms are obtained more than 6 months after the employee's first exposure at or above the action level, employees shall wear hearing protectors for any period exceeding six months after first exposure until the baseline audiogram is obtained. (iii) 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. (iv) The employer shall notify employees of the need to avoid high levels of non-occupational noise exposure during the 14-hour period immediately preceding the audiometric examination.

(6) **Annual audiogram.** At least annually after obtaining the baseline audiogram, the employer shall obtain a new audiogram for each employee exposed at or above an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels.

(7) **Evaluation of audiogram.** (i) Each employee's annual audiogram shall be compared to that employee's baseline audiogram to determine if the audiogram is valid and if a standard threshold shift as defined in paragraph (g)(10) of this section has occurred. This comparison may be done by a technician. (ii) If the annual audiogram shows that an employee has suffered a standard threshold shift, the employer may obtain a retest within 30 days and consider the results of the retest as the annual audiogram. (iii) The audiologist, otolaryngologist, or physician shall review problem audiograms and shall determine whether there is a need for further evaluation. The employer shall provide to the person performing this evaluation the following information: (A) A copy of the requirements for hearing conservation as set forth in paragraphs (c) through (n) of this section; (B) The baseline audiogram and most recent audiogram of the employee to be evaluated; (C) Measurements of background sound pressure levels in the audiometric test room as required in Appendix D: *Audiometric Test Rooms*. (D) Records of audiometer calibrations required by paragraph (h)(5) of this section.

(8) **Follow-up procedures.** (i) If a comparison of the annual audiogram to the baseline audiogram indicates a standard threshold shift as defined in paragraph (g)(10) of this section has occurred, the employee shall be informed of this fact in writing, within 21 days of the determination. (ii) Unless a physician determines that the standard threshold shift is not work related or aggravated by occupational noise exposure, the employer shall ensure that the following steps are taken when a standard threshold shift occurs:

(A) Employees not using hearing protectors shall be fitted with hearing protectors, trained in their use and care, and required to use them. (B) Employees already using hearing protectors shall be refitted and retrained in the use of hearing protectors and provided with hearing protectors offering greater attenuation if necessary. (C) The employee shall be referred for a clinical audiological evaluation or an otological examination, as appropriate, if additional testing is necessary or if the employer suspects that a medical pathology of the ear is caused or aggravated by the wearing of hearing protectors. (D) The employee is informed of the need for an otological examination if a medical pathology of the ear that is unrelated to the use of hearing protectors is suspected. (iii) If subsequent audiometric testing of an employee whose exposure to noise is less than an 8-hour TWA of 90 decibels indicates that a standard threshold shift is not persistent, the employer: (A) Shall inform the employee of the new audiometric interpretation; and (B) May discontinue the required use of hearing protectors for that employee.

(9) **Revised baseline.** An annual audiogram may be substituted for the baseline audiogram when, in the judgment of the audiologist, otolaryngologist or physician who is evaluating the audiogram: (i) The standard threshold shift revealed by the audiogram is persistent; or (ii) The hearing threshold shown in the annual audiogram indicates significant improvement over the baseline audiogram.

(10) **Standard threshold shift.** (i) As used in this section, a standard threshold shift is a change in hearing threshold relative to the baseline audiogram of an average of 10 dB or more at 2000, 3000, and 4000 Hz in either ear.

(ii) In determining whether a standard threshold shift has occurred, allowance may be made for the contribution of aging (presbycusis) to the change in hearing level by correcting the annual audiogram according to the procedure described in Appendix F: *Calculation and Application of Age Correction to Audiograms*.

(h) **Audiometric test requirements.** (1) Audiometric tests shall be pure tone, air conduction, hearing threshold examinations, with test frequencies including as a minimum 500, 1000, 2000, 3000, 4000, and 6000 Hz. Tests at each frequency shall be taken separately for each ear.

(2) Audiometric tests shall be conducted with audiometers (including microprocessor audiometers) that meet the specifications of, and are maintained and used in accordance with, American National Standard Specification for Audiometers, S3.6-1969, which is incorporated by reference as specified in Sec. 1910.6.

(3) Pulsed-tone and self-recording audiometers, if used, shall meet the requirements specified in Appendix C: *Audiometric Measuring Instruments*.

(4) Audiometric examinations shall be administered in a room meeting the requirements listed in Appendix D: *Audiometric Test Rooms*.

(5) **Audiometer calibration.** (i) The functional operation of the audiometer shall be checked before each day's use by testing a person with known, stable hearing thresholds, and by listening to the audiometer's output to make sure that the output is free from distorted or unwanted sounds. Deviations of 10 decibels or greater require an acoustic calibration. (ii) Audiometer calibration shall be checked acoustically at least annually in accordance with Appendix E: *Acoustic Calibration of Audiometers*. Test frequencies below 500 Hz and above 6000 Hz may be omitted from this check. Deviations of 15 decibels or greater require an exhaustive calibration. (iii) An exhaustive calibration shall be performed at least every two years in accordance with sections 4.1.2; 4.1.3.; 4.1.4.3; 4.2; 4.4.1; 4.4.2; 4.4.3; and 4.5 of the American National Standard Specification for Audiometers, S3.6-1969. Test frequencies below 500 Hz and above 6000 Hz may be omitted from this calibration.

(i) **Hearing protectors.** (1) Employers shall make hearing protectors available to all employees exposed to an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels or greater at no cost to the employees. Hearing protectors shall be replaced as necessary.

(2) Employers shall ensure that hearing protectors are worn: (i) By an employee who is required by paragraph (b)(1) of this section to wear personal protective equipment; and (ii) By any employee who is exposed to an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels or greater, and who: (A) Has not yet had a baseline audiogram established pursuant to paragraph (g)(5)(ii); or (B) Has experienced a standard threshold shift.

(3) Employees shall be given the opportunity to select their hearing protectors from a variety of suitable hearing protectors provided by the employer.

(4) The employer shall provide training in the use and care of all hearing protectors provided to employees.

(5) The employer shall ensure proper initial fitting and supervise the correct use of all hearing protectors.

(j) **Hearing protector attenuation.** 1) The employer shall evaluate hearing protector attenuation for the specific noise environments in which the protector will be used. The employer shall use one of the evaluation methods described in Appendix B: *Methods for Estimating the Adequacy of Hearing Protection Attenuation*.

(2) Hearing protectors must attenuate employee exposure at least to an 8-hour time-weighted average of 90 decibels as required by paragraph (b) of this section.

(3) For employees who have experienced a standard threshold shift, hearing protectors must attenuate employee exposure to an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels or below.

(4) The adequacy of hearing protector attenuation shall be re-evaluated whenever employee noise exposures increase to the extent that the hearing protectors provided may no longer provide adequate attenuation. The employer shall provide more effective hearing protectors where necessary.

(k) **Training program.** (1) The employer shall train each employee who is exposed to noise at or above an 8-hour time weighted average of 85 decibels in accordance with the requirements of this section. The employer shall institute a training program and ensure employee participation in the program.

(2) The training program shall be repeated annually for each employee included in the hearing conservation program. Information provided in the training program shall be updated to be consistent with changes in protective equipment and work processes.

(3) The employer shall ensure that each employee is informed of the following: (i) The effects of noise on hearing; (ii) The purpose of hearing protectors, the advantages, disadvantages, and attenuation of various types, and instructions on selection, fitting, use, and care; and (iii) The purpose of audiometric testing, and an explanation of the test procedures.

(l) **Access to information and training materials.** (1) The employer shall make available to affected employees or their representatives copies of this standard and shall also post a copy in the workplace.

(2) The employer shall provide to affected employees any informational materials pertaining to the standard that are supplied to the employer by the Assistant Secretary.

(3) The employer shall provide, upon request, all materials related to the employer's training and education program pertaining to this standard to the Assistant Secretary and the Director.

(m) **Recordkeeping.** (1) Exposure measurements. The employer shall maintain an accurate record of all employee exposure measurements required by paragraph (d) of this section.

(2) Audiometric tests. (i) The employer shall retain all employee audiometric test records obtained pursuant to paragraph (g) of this section: (ii) This record shall include: (A) Name and job classification of the employee; (B) Date of the audiogram; (C) The examiner's name; (D) Date of the last acoustic or exhaustive calibration of the audiometer; and (E) Employee's most recent noise exposure assessment. (F) The employer shall maintain accurate records of the measurements of the background sound pressure levels in audiometric test rooms.

(3) Record retention. The employer shall retain records required in this paragraph (m) for at least the following periods. (i) Noise exposure measurement records shall be retained for two years. (ii) Audiometric test records shall be retained for the duration of the affected employee's employment.

(4) 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 Assistant Secretary. The provisions of 29 CFR 1910.1020 (a)-(e) and (g)-(i) apply to access to records under this section.

(5) Transfer of records. If the employer ceases to do business, the employer shall transfer to the successor employer all records required to be maintained by this section, and the successor employer shall retain them for the remainder of the period prescribed in paragraph (m)(3) of this section.

(n) **Appendices.** (1) Appendices A, B, C, D, and E to this section are incorporated as part of this section and the contents of these appendices are mandatory.

(2) Appendices F and G to this section are informational and are not intended to create any additional obligations not otherwise imposed or to detract from any existing obligations.

(o) **Exemptions.** Paragraphs (c) through (n) of this section shall not apply to employers engaged in oil and gas well drilling and servicing operations.

Additional information, as well as Appendices A-I of the Amendment are available from the hearing conservation program administrator at this facility. For more complete information, see 29 CFR 1910.95.

To learn more, visit the OSHA Noise & Hearing Conservation e-tool online <http://osha.gov/dts/osta/otm/noise/index.html> and the E-A-R educational site at www.e-a-r.com/hearingconservation.