

TOOLBOX TALK: HEARING PROTECTION

Job or site _____

Date _____

Led by _____

Open with this

Rule of thumb before we start. If you have to raise your voice to be understood by somebody at arm's length, it is loud enough to be damaging you right now.

The talk

Noise damage is mechanical. The hair cells in the inner ear that pick up sound get destroyed by loud sound and they do not grow back. There is no treatment, no surgery and no recovery. What is gone is gone.

The construction limit is ninety decibels A weighted averaged over eight hours, and the allowable time halves for roughly every five decibel increase. Two hours at one hundred decibels is the limit. A circular saw is around one hundred. A chop saw and a chainsaw are higher. A jackhammer or a powder actuated tool is higher still.

That means a normal framing day is over the limit before lunch, and nobody notices because the damage is painless. The warning sign is ringing in your ears at the end of the day, or the world sounding muffled on the drive home. That is not tiredness, that is injury.

Plugs or muffs both work if they are worn properly, and neither works at all if they are not. Foam plugs have to be rolled thin, inserted while pulling the ear up and back, and held until they expand. A plug sitting in the opening of the ear does almost nothing.

Muffs are better for people who go in and out of noise all day, because they are faster. Plugs are better under a hard hat in tight spaces and in heat. In very loud work, plugs and muffs together get you more than either alone.

And it is not just the operator. Noise fills a space. If somebody is running a chop saw ten feet away, you are in it too, and the person cutting has the protection while you have none.

Point at these before anybody starts

- The loudest tool on this site today, and who is near it
- Where the hearing protection is kept, and whether there is enough for everyone
- One person demonstrating how a foam plug actually goes in
- Who is working within earshot of the loud work, not just doing it

- Anybody who says their ears ring at the end of the day
- Whether we can move the loud work, enclose it, or do it when fewer people are here

The rules that apply

- The construction limit is 90 dBA as an 8 hour average, with allowable exposure time halving as the level rises.
- If you must raise your voice to be heard at arm's length, hearing protection is needed.
- Foam plugs are rolled down thin, inserted with the ear pulled up and back, and held while they expand.
- Protection covers everybody in the noise, not only the person running the tool.
- Double up with plugs and muffs for the loudest work such as jackhammers, powder actuated tools and demolition.
- Ringing ears or muffled hearing after a shift means the protection was not enough. Say so.

Ask the crew

- Whose ears ring at night? Be honest, because that is the early sign.
- Who is going to be standing near the loud work today without a tool in their hand?
- Is there a way to do the loudest cut somewhere else, or at a time when fewer of us are here?

Close with this

If you have to shout to be heard, put them in. Ringing at the end of the day means damage, not tiredness.

Attendance

Everybody who was present signs, including subcontractors and anybody visiting the site.

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This talk is general safety information for a crew briefing, not legal advice and not a substitute for the training your employees are required to have. Standards are quoted for orientation only. Check the current text of the standard and your own state plan, which may be stricter than the federal rule.