



# Hearing Conservation Policy

Revision Date: October 2013

- 1) **Applicability:** This policy applies to employees, students and volunteers at all OHSU locations, who are exposed to noise levels exceeding OSHA's permitted 85 dBA for an 8-hour Time Weighted Average (TWA). No such areas are known to exist at OHSU.
  
- 2) **Scope and Purpose:** This policy provides guidance on the means to protect against the harmful physical/physiological and psychological effects of noise encountered in the work environment.
  
- 3) **Guidelines:**
  - a. **Definitions**
    - i. Action Level (AL) - Exposure level at which hearing conservation is initiated. OHSU has adopted the OSHA exposure limit of 85 dBA for an 8-Hour Time Weighted Average (TWA).
    - ii. Permissible Exposure Limit (PEL) - Exposure limit at which feasible noise controls and hearing protection would be required. Note: OSHA sets the PEL at 90 dBA. OHSU's policy is to have these requirements triggered at the Action Level.
    - iii. dBA - The "A" weighted scale is used for noise measurement. The dBA scale reflects measurements closest to human hearing.
  - b. **Responsibilities**
    - i. Environmental Health & Radiation Safety (EHRS) is responsible for coordinating the noise control and hearing conservation program, for directing periodic monitoring and evaluations of potentially high noise exposures sources and ensuring that education and training is accomplished for covered employees.
    - ii. Occupational Health (OH) is responsible for the coordination and evaluation of audiometric testing, where required, and as described in the OSHA standard. OH shall also review and evaluate audiograms and maintain health records.
    - iii. Managers shall oversee the daily and/or appropriate use of hearing protectors where required.
    - iv. Employees working in hazardous noise areas will;
      1. wear authorized and properly fitted hearing protection devices
      2. report for all required annual examinations and training
  
- 4) **Procedures:**
  - a. EHRS will survey and monitor areas and/or operations to determine if employees are at risk, and require the use of hearing protection. Specific areas or operations requiring the use of hearing protectors will be identified by the EHRS Department. Follow up monitoring is required only when changes

- in process or practices would result in higher exposure levels, or if such changes result in eliminating excessive exposures.
- b. Monitoring shall be conducted whenever there is a change in equipment, process or work assignment that may result in over-exposures as defined by Oregon OSHA, using a sound level meter, to identify areas of potential risk (>85 dBA). When such areas are identified, noise dosimeters shall be used if there is a potential for achieving the 8 Hour TWA for noise. Monitoring shall also be conducted if employee complaints are received. Monitoring instruments shall conform to the accuracy and precision requirements outlined in the OSHA standard.
  - c. EHRM may make recommendations for employees/areas impacted by noise levels that do not meet the TWA criteria. This is in consideration for areas that have;
    - i. high level-short duration noise
    - ii. temporary noise sources
    - iii. noise levels slightly below OSHA's Action Level
    - iv. noise characteristics that are posing undue stress
  - d. The wearing of hearing protection is mandatory in hazardous noise environments or during noisy operations as defined in this policy.
  - e. Hearing Protection:
    - i. Hearing protection will be made readily available to employees consistent with the level of noise exposure experienced. EHRM will specify the type of hearing protection best suited for the exposure or working conditions. This protection may include disposable protectors, muffs, molded noise breakers, or sound canceling devices.
    - ii. Employees issued hearing protection devices shall be responsible for maintaining this equipment in hygienic condition and for replacing disposable ones as necessary. Cleaning of non-disposable equipment may be accomplished in mild, soapy water, followed by rinsing.
    - iii. Foam ear-plugs should be disposed between uses. These are also not recommended where metal filings or other abrasive materials are present; as these materials can irritate the ear canal and may result in infections.
  - f. Audiometric Testing (baseline audiogram) will be conducted on all employees subject to noise exposures above the Action Level.
    - i. If no previous baseline audiogram exists, an audiogram will be conducted on any employee assigned/transferred into areas/operations in which excessive noise levels have been documented.
    - ii. Testing will be performed annually for employees whose occupational noise exposure reached the Action Level. OH is responsible for assuring that each employee's annual audiogram shall be examined by a qualified audiometric technician and reviewed by a licensed or certified audiologist to determine if a significant threshold shift relative to the baseline audiogram has occurred. A threshold shift is defined in the OSHA's Hearing Conservation standard.

- iii. If a significant shift has been identified, the employee shall be re-tested within one month. If the shift persists, the audiologist shall recommend an appropriate course of action not limited to the following;
  - 1. re-instruction of the employee in the proper use and care of his/her hearing protection device.
  - 2. Referral of employee for appropriate medical evaluation.
- iv. Employee audiology test records shall be retained with Employee Health records in accordance with medical records standards, for the duration of the worker's employment.
- v. All audiometric test procedures and equipment used for such testing shall conform to requirements in 29 CFR 1910.95, paragraphs (g) and (h).
- g. The use of Engineering Controls shall be assessed for exposures exceeding 90 dBA. These controls will use *sound* noise engineering principles.
- h. Postings – Signs shall be posted in areas where hearing protection is required.
- i. Training – EHRS will provide training as required for employees enrolled in the hearing conservation program.
- j. Record-keeping – Exposure records shall be maintained in EHRS. Copies of exposure records documenting employee exposure above the Action Level shall be furnished to Occupational Health.
- k. Review of Hearing Conservation Program Activities –EHRS will report to the OHSU Safety Committee as appropriate, on program activities; including problems identified and resolved. EHRS shall also direct monitoring for previously unidentified work activities that may result in overexposures.

**History:** Replaces version August 2010

**References:**

Oregon OSHA (OAR 437-002-0095)  
OSHA (29 CFR 1910.95)

**Responsible Office:**

Environmental Health & Radiation Safety