

The effects of loud noise can cause permanent hearing loss. Construction workers are especially prone to noise related hearing loss due to their exposure to huge machines and other types of construction equipment.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) reports that nearly 30 million workers in the United States are exposed to hazardous noise levels every year. And hearing loss isn't the only consequence. Loud noise can also lead to workplace injuries because warning signals become more difficult to hear. Loud noise also creates stress on workers, leading to a reduction in productivity.

So what are acceptable noise levels? OSHA mandates a hearing conservation program for general industry workers who are exposed to levels exceeding 85 dBA for more than eight hours. That number rises to 90 dBA for construction workers. (Note: dBA refers to the relative loudness of sounds as perceived by the human ear.)

There are many ways to implement a worksite noise reduction plan. These include the use of low-noise tools and machinery; isolating or enclosing loud machines and equipment; and placing barriers between workers and noisy equipment.

Some other ways to cut down on noise exposure is to operate noisy machines during times when there are fewer workers present, limit time workers spend around loud equipment and machinery, and provide quiet areas for workers to rest away from loud noises.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is now promoting a Buy Quiet program to prevent hearing loss due to hazardous noise levels.

The program encourages companies to take the following steps to reduce hearing loss:

1. Buy or rent quieter machinery and tools to help reduce worker exposure to noise levels.
2. Educate companies about hazardous workplace noise levels so employers can make informed decisions when buying equipment.
3. Encourage manufacturers to create quieter tools and machinery by producing a demand for quieter products.

A successful Buy Quiet program will not only allow companies to remain [OSHA compliant](#), it also will help to reduce employee hearing loss and lower the long-term costs of protective equipment. Finally, it will help to lower the amount and number of workers' compensation claims.

Another effective way companies can reduce the amount of hazardous noise is to conduct workplace noise sampling which includes personal noise monitoring to identify the most at-risk employees. Once these samples are completed, a company should:

- Inform workers of their test results
- Maintain records of hearing tests
- Implement comprehensive hearing protection follow-up procedures for workers who exhibit a loss of hearing
- Select proper hearing protection for individual workers
- Train workers about the hazards from excessive noise exposure
- Train workers on how to properly use personal protective equipment

Hazardous noise is a common but manageable problem. The key is for everyone – workers, companies, and

equipment manufacturers – to work together to keep the noise down.