

Hearing Conservation Fact Sheet

It is the intent of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to provide its employees with a safe and healthy work environment. This is accomplished as much as possible through the use of accepted engineering and/or administrative controls. When these controls are not feasible or inadequate, personal protective equipment is provided.

As a general rule, noise may damage your hearing if you are at arm's length and have to shout to make yourself heard. Exposure to high noise levels may cause your ears to ring, or you may have difficulty hearing for several hours after exposure to the noise. To determine if hearing protection is required for your work area, contact the Division of Safety and Compliance Occupational Safety and Health section.

Noise is one of the most pervasive problems in today's occupational environment, causing gradual hearing loss in workers in a wide variety of occupations. Because of this hazard, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) developed standards designed to protect workers who are occupationally exposed to excessive noise. The OSHA noise standards (29 CFR 1910.95 and 29 CFR 1926.52) are enforced at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign by the Illinois OSHA.

In compliance with the adopted OSHA standards, the University of Illinois has developed a Hearing Conservation Program that provides policies and guidance to protect workers from occupational noise. All employees shall adhere to the Hearing Conservation Program as applicable.

Before any campus unit requires an employee to wear hearing protection the following items must be completed:

Required Use of Hearing Protection

1. A hazard evaluation must be conducted to ascertain the occupational noise exposure and to determine the method(s) of control (engineering, administrative, and/or personal protection).
 - Contact the Division of Safety and Compliance Occupational Safety and Health section to conduct a hazard evaluation.
 - The selection of appropriate hearing protection is made only after a determination has been made as to the real and/or potential exposure of the University's employees to high levels of noise.
 - Workers who are exposed to a time-weighted average of 85 decibels (A-scale) for more for an eight-hour exposure are considered to have occupational noise exposure. These workers must be enrolled in the [University's Hearing Conservation Program](#).
2. Develop and maintain written standard operating procedures (SOP).
 - These SOPs give specific information regarding unit procedures for implementing the Hearing Conservation Program. A sample SOP is located in Appendix A of the Hearing Conservation Program.
 - The Division of Safety and Compliance Occupational Safety and Health section can provide assistance in the development of unit-specific SOPs.

3. Annual audiometric testing

- Audiometric testing is available for a fee to faculty and staff enrolled in the University's Hearing Conservation Program through the Speech and Hearing Clinic initially and annually as long as the employee is performing the same basic job functions.
- Audiometric testing is available at no cost to full-time students through the Speech and Hearing Clinic at a frequency of once per calendar year.

4. Attend annual training.

- The Department of Speech and Hearing Science conducts this training; the cost is included in the fee for services.

Voluntary Use of Hearing Protection

If the hazard evaluation determines that hearing protection is not required individuals may still wear it for their own comfort. Campus units do not have to provide hearing protection at no cost to voluntary users.

Hearing Protection Inventory Control

Distribution of hearing protection from campus storerooms is not restricted; however, hazard evaluations must be completed to differentiate required users from voluntary users. It is recommended that this Fact Sheet be available in the storeroom to individuals procuring hearing protection.

Workers required to use hearing protection must be given the opportunity to select hearing protectors from a variety of suitable hearing protectors. If only a single protector is maintained in a campus storeroom it is recommended that information on the availability of other protectors be provided to required users.

Questions concerning occupational exposure to noise should be directed to the Division of Safety and Compliance Occupational Safety and Health section, (217) 265-9828 or oshs@illinois.edu.