



NEWS

JB Pritzker, Governor

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Prevent Hearing Damage at Work

October is National Protect Your Hearing Month

SPRINGFIELD – Hearing loss can happen at any age, and prolonged exposure to sounds that are too loud can have a lasting effect. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says roughly 40 million Americans, between the ages of 20 and 60, have noise-induced hearing loss. The Illinois Department of Labor is stressing safety in October during National Protect Your Hearing Month.

“There are simple steps that can be taken by workers to prevent long-term damage to their hearing. That includes the proper protective equipment and knowing how loud is too loud,” said **Illinois Department of Labor Director Michael Kleinik**.

If you must raise your voice to speak with someone three feet away, noise levels likely exceed 85 decibels, the threshold for hearing loss. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) says long or repeated exposure to sounds at or above 85 decibels can lead to hearing loss. That’s why OSHA requires employers to have a hearing conservation program when noise exposure is at or above 85 decibels averaged over 8 working hours.

Working around jet engines, jackhammers or chainsaws are examples of obvious dangers to your hearing if exposure lasts too long. The louder the noise, the less time necessary to be exposed to suffer hearing damage.

Damage is permanent. While hearing aids can assist, nothing reverses hearing damage once it occurs. Noise-induced hearing damage affects a person’s ability to hear high-frequency sounds and understand speech.

There are ways to prevent hearing loss:

- Avoid loud noises and/or limit both proximity and time exposed to loud noise;
- Use hearing protection (like earplugs or hearing protection earmuffs) when near loud noises;
- Talk to your doctor if you’re worried about your hearing.

Noise mitigation can take several forms and can often be accomplished without great expense or engineering. Some simple steps include keeping machinery properly lubricated, choosing low-noise tools and machinery, placing barriers between the noise source and workers. Employers can also reduce the amount of time a worker spends in a noisy area and provide quiet areas for relief from dangerous noise levels.

While specially calibrated instruments are used to do OSHA testing for noise levels, a device is available for anyone curious about the noise levels around them. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health offers a free download of a sound level meter for any iOS-operating device here: [NIOSH Sound Level Meter App](#)

For more information on Illinois OSHA, click here: [Illinois OSHA](#)

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