

# The Hearing Conservation Program

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## Purpose

To explain the structure and benefits of an effective hearing conservation program

## Chapter Topics

- Benefits of an Effective Hearing Conservation Program
- Establishing a Hearing Conservation Program
- Major Components of a Hearing Conservation Program

## Benefits of an Effective Hearing Conservation Program

Workers benefit from an effective **Hearing Conservation Program** (HCP) through the prevention of temporary and permanent occupational and nonoccupational **noise-induced hearing loss** (NIHL). Identification and reduction or elimination of noise-related hazards can also lower the risk of **tinnitus**, stress-related illness, fatigue and **annoyance**.

Better worker morale and the decreased likelihood of anti-social behavior due to annoyance and stress improve labor-management relations. Less noise and better hearing can lead to greater job satisfaction and safety. Studies show that HCPs can reduce accident rates and illnesses and increase productivity.<sup>1,2</sup> Engineering or administrative controls can lower absenteeism.<sup>3</sup> Finally, preventing NIHL reduces the risk of **Workers' Compensation** payments and may help contain costs associated with Workers Compensation insurance premiums.

## Establishing a Hearing Conservation Program

The first and probably most important step in establishing an HCP is to get the entire management team to cooperate. Without its support, the program is likely to fail. Managers and supervisors must understand the rationale for the program, the effects of noise on hearing, the requirements of applicable regulations, and the need for their participation. For example, all management personnel and visitors must always wear **hearing protection devices** (HPDs) in noisy environments. Otherwise, workers feel that HPDs are a burden only for labor and that management does not consider them important.

The next step is to enlist the support of the workers to be enrolled in the HCP. If possible, they should be included in planning the program. Workers usually know the most about factors important to the HCP, such as work schedules, sources of noise in their environments, whether improved maintenance could reduce the noise of their machines and how to control the noise. If the workers are unionized, enlist the cooperation of the local union president or safety representatives and include them in planning if possible. When HPDs are necessary, officials should lead the way and help workers adjust to them.

Early development of an **engineering noise-control** plan is very important. Not only is noise control the most satisfactory ultimate solution, but workers are more inclined to accept the idea of HPDs if they know everything has been done to reduce noise at its source. The **occupational hearing conservationist** (OHC) does not usually create the noise-control plan (unless otherwise trained), but he or she can stress its importance with management.

## Major Components of a Hearing Conservation Program

Upcoming chapters contain more information on an HCP's components; but here we summarize the major components of the program:

- noise measurement
- noise control
- hearing protection
- audiometric monitoring
- worker training and motivation
- recordkeeping
- program evaluation

As noted in Ch. 7 regulations, statutes and guidelines require most of these components. The Council for Accreditation in Occupational Hearing Conservation (CAOHC) recommends conducting a quality assurance evaluation to assess HCP success.

## Noise Measurement

Although relatively few OHCs conduct noise measurements, the OHC should be aware of the basic concepts of this integral part