How is the Hearing Conservation Program Working?

Chairperson's Message
by Jeffrey C. Morrill, MS - Chair

OHCs are often asked to provide an update or an appraisal of the status of the hearing conservation program (HCP) by the company's management. The determination of program effectiveness must be performed by the supervising professional (per OSHA), however, there are a number of indicators which the CHE can use to report to management on how the company is doing to support the overall effort.

Step 1: STOP!

Hopefully there is a copy of the official company policy covering all five aspects of the OSHA HCP Amendment. Review it! Is the document up-to-date? For example, is the most current version OSHA 200 (or is it 300-1971) referenced? At what level is STS being recorded, when are they lined out, and has the professional program supervisor provided documentation to enforce the methodology for each aspect of the company program?

These policy documents may include specifications for administration of the hearing protection program, purchase policy and even how HPDs are to be distributed to employees. This can become outdated with the changes in technology and new information and should be reviewed annually. This is an area where the company can incur liability. A few companies have discovered old policy documents prohibiting the use of HPDs for certain jobs, thus providing rather incriminating documentation for plaintiff attorneys. The OHC can provide a valuable service to the company through identifying those types of antiquated documents and bringing them to the attention of management.

These documents are an important part of the overall program success, as they provide direction, commitment and a legal basis for the organization to follow. The reinforcement of these through periodic review, revision and refresher training can greatly enhance the participation of management, supervisors and employees. The OHC should be well positioned to advise management on many aspects of these policies, particularly those which relate to the five areas of OSHA compliance.

Step 2: LOOK!

Periodically take a stroll through your plant’s mandatory hearing conservation areas to observe the overall use of hearing protection devices (HPDs) and if the employees seem to be inserting them deeply into the ear canal. Are the protectors in continued use?

Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on the Effects of Noise on Hearing Now Available

Chairperson's Message, continued from page 2

the ear, are they around the neck, or across ways in the ear canal? This should be a pre-audit tour where the OHC is only mentally counting the number of employees that appear to be out of compliance. If the employees become aware of what the plant walk-through is for, the HFD practice may quickly change and the OHC will not get a true picture of what is really happening day-to-day. It is particularly important to note the hearing protection practice of the supervisors, management, and the more tenured employees during this stroll.

Calculate the number of observed variations in terms of a percentage and this will provide management with at least a crude assessment of the overall participation. Even one employee found to be non-compliant in mandatory areas is unacceptable. This illustrates the probability that the company's policy has not been enforced consistently by the supervisors. If the incidence of non-compliance by employees is several percent or more, it is probably a pretty serious situation. If supervisors or management are found to be in the non-compliant group, then, a major overhaul of the hearing conservation program is in order. Management should be advised of these "tell tale" signs, good or bad.

Step 3: LISTEN!

When employees arrive at their appointment for the annual hearing test, ask to see their hearing protectors. Inspect the protectors and ask how often they replace them, clean them, or lost them. Ask the employees to show you how they insert the HFD into the ear and ask them how often they wear them. Most employees will tell the truth, especially if there is not a very good enforcement program in place and if they have not been convinced of the benefit of the program. But you have to ask them.

Often, employees will complain about the HFD's comfort, interference with speech communication, or prevention of the employee from hearing machines or work processes. These may be very legitimate complaints and should be documented and followed up. If the OHC cannot resolve the problem, the employee will probably not wear the HFD consistently. Fortunately, there are good solutions to virtually all of these complaints through a variety of selection, fitting and educational techniques.

If the employees do not have their HFDs within a month they come into the test, the probability is that they do not participate in the HCP. The OHC should keep an account of these observations, and the results of the informal employee interviews, to convey an accurate picture of participation for management. These types of surveys are excellent means to help management understand and support the OHC's efforts.

The Missouri motto is Show Me! I have come to appreciate that saying, thoroughly in my career in hearing conservation. Compliance is often more a state of mind than reality. If we are to preserve hearing through effective, hearing conservation, that we must insist (at a minimum) that all aspects of the OSHA regulation are in place. The benefit of an effective program should be improved safety and productivity, with improved human communication capability in addition to compliance.

Show me that all employees have had their annual hearing test. Show me that each employee has up-to-date noise monitoring information. Show me that "problem audiograms" have been reviewed by the professional and referred as necessary. Show me that employees with STS have been properly retrained and counseled. Show me that the hearing protection program selection, training and supervision is in place. Finally, show me that the employees, supervisors, and management support the program as an integral part of the employee health and safety program, day after day. When all of these pieces are in place, you can show management that the hearing conservation program is working well!
Federal OSHA Reform and NIOSH Activity

(Excerpt from ASHA Audiology Newsletter posted by Evey Cheron, ASHA Audiology Branch Director)

In April 1996, Representative Cass Ballenger (R-North Carolina) introduced H.R. 3234, the Safety and Health Improvement Legislative Reform Act. The three provisions in this bill of most interest to those involved in hearing conservation are:

1. OSHA's standards would be subject to a cost-benefit analysis;
2. OSHA would reduce penalties by up to 100% for small business (defined as employers of 250 or fewer employees), and
3. OSHA would be prohibited from issuing citations and penalties for most paperwork violations including record keeping and the development of written plans for serious health and safety hazards.

The bill would also codify the state consultation program and prohibit OSHA from establishing inspection quotas. In June, Representative Ballenger requested comments from the Department of Labor on H.R. 3234. Robert Kehl, Secretary of Labor, expressed concerns about the impact such legislation would have on worker safety and health. He stated, "...I am deeply concerned that H.R. 3234, if it becomes law, would represent a retreat on worker protections, rather than an advancement... As such, I believe that, as written, this legislation fails within the scope of Vice President Gore's veto threat earlier this year".

In April, H.R. 3234 was favorably reported out of the Subcommittee on Workforce Protections. The bill has now been scheduled for mark up by the full Committee on Economic and Educational Opportunities as early as August.

Specialty Commission Proposed

The ASHA Clinical Specialty Board (CSB) is inviting comments regarding the recognition by ASHA of the proposed Specialty Commission on Hearing Conservation. An application for establishment of a Specialty Commission on Hearing Conservation was submitted jointly to the CSB by the Military Audiology Association, the National Hearing Conservation Association, and the Air Force Audiology Association.

Application for recognition as a specialty area is a two-phase process. At this time, the application for the Specialty Commission on Hearing Conservation is in Stage I (Letter of intent) of the process. Stage II is intended to involve the CSB in a documentation regarding the appropriateness of identifying a particular area of practice as a specialty area, and to confirm that the petitioning group represents practitioners in that area. If the CSB rules favorably on the application, the petitioning group will have exclusive rights to proceed to Stage III (application for recognition of the process in their area. Stage III provides details of the proposed program of specialty recognition.

The CSB has no power to create areas of specialty recognition. Rejection is to evaluate and respond to requests for establishment of specialty areas of practice. In doing so, the CSB weighs heavily the comments from consumers and practitioners.

To obtain a copy of the application contact Joan Maddock; e-mail address jmaddock@asha.org or by phone 301/897-5706 ext 223. To receive a copy by fax-on-demand, call 202/274-4520. Responses and comments either in support or opposition may be sent to Clinical Specialty Board, ASHA, 10801 Rockville Pike, Rockville, MD 20852. The deadline for responses is early September 1996.

Events

Southern Course Director Workshop Offered

The October 1996 Course Director Workshop will be held Monday, October 7th at the Sheraton New Orleans in New Orleans, Louisiana.

This workshop is for CDAs who are planning to initially certify, recertify the workshop method or are a CDA who certified/recertified in 1991 or later. Initial certification and recertification applications should have been received by the CAOHC office at preservice. If you need additional copies of the workshop materials, please call the CAOHC office at 414/276-5338. The Council is looking forward to a successful full workshop.

November Meeting in the Northwest

Prior to the November ASHA Annual Convention in Seattle, Washington, a CAOHC Course Director Workshop will be offered. This workshop will be held on Thursday, November 21, 1996 at the Seattle Hilton.

You should attend if you are planning to initially certify, recertify by the workshop method or are a CDA who certified/recertified in 1991 or later. Initial certification and recertification applications should have been received by the CAOHC office. Registration fee for the November workshop is $2000, and includes one copy of the 3rd Edition of the Hearing Conservation Manual. All applications are processed through a Screening Committee and applications must be received no later than October 21, 1996.

CAOHC workshops offer continuing education units for their workshops. Additional information is available through the CAOHC office.
Editor's Correction

In the June, 1996 edition of the UPDATE, page 4, the article titled "Development of an AIHA Statement on a Recommended Criterion for Recording Occupational Hearing Loss on OSHA Form 200" as prepared by Elliott Berger, MS, Chair of the AIHA Noise Committee, contained an error in The Position Statement. The second paragraph of the Position Statement was an editorial aside not meant to be reflected as part of the Position Statement. The Position Statement as prepared by AIHA Noise Committee reads as follows:

The Position Statement

This position statement was prepared by the Noise Committee of the AIHA in response to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA's) request in the Federal Register, dated February 2, 1996, for comments concerning the issue of appropriate criteria for recording occupational hearing loss on OSHA Form 300 (previously designated Form 200). The Committee reaffirms the 1987 AIHA position, which was at that time also approved by the Board of Directors of the AIHA (Driscoll, DP and Motrell, JC 1987). "A position paper on a recommended criterion for recording occupational hearing loss on the OSHA Form 200," AIHA 48(11), A 714-A 716.

Recommended criteria for recording hearing shifts on Form 300

AIHA's recommendation is in record confirmed (i.e. persistent) work-related OSHA Standard Threshold Shifts (STs) on Form 300. An ST is defined as a change from the baseline audiogram of 10 dB or more in the average of thresholds at 2000, 3000, and 4000 Hz in either ear, after adjustments for age correction. The mere fact of exposure to TWAs of 85 dB or greater is not sufficient to confirm that an ST is work-related; rather, the complete procedure outlined on page A-715 of the 1987 Position statement should be implemented. Also on page A-715 is discussion of the importance of recording confirmed 10 dB work-related shifts even though they may not represent compensable hearing loss.

Specific details regarding recordability of hearing shifts

In the 1987 AIHA position statement, statements were made concerning the requirement for a 30-day retest, and presumption of a persistent ST in the absence of such a retest. These statements were based upon the OSHA requirements in the Hearing Conservation Amendment pertaining to a retest, potential notification of the employee concerning any hearing changes, and subsequent follow-up [29 CFR 1910.95 (g)(3)(ii)]. However, in the current OSHA proposal it would appear that all shifts meeting the OSHA recordability criterion, confirmed or otherwise, are to be recorded on Form 300, and then later lined out if foun to be persistent. The hard copy of this document does not contain the words "confirmed" or "persistent." A more efficient, and yet suitably protective and accurate approach is recommended as follows: 

• Only confirmed (i.e persistent) work-related STSs are to be recorded on Form 300, unless a follow-up audiogram is not administered as described in the following bulleted item. The steps involving confirmation of STs and work-relatedness include an optional follow-up audiogram and the procedures summarized in the following section of this document, which are described in greater detail on page A-715 of the 1987 position statement.

• If a follow-up audiogram is not administered within 30 days of the initial determination of the ST, or if the follow-up audiogram confirms the ST, then the ST is presumed to be persistent, and if determined to be work-related, must be recorded on Form 300.

• If a follow-up audiogram is given within 30 days of the initial determination of the ST that does not confirm the ST, nothing is to be recorded on Form 300.

Clarification regarding current OSHA proposal on work relatedness

The current OSHA notice of proposed rule making appears to make the presumption of work relatedness whenever an ST is detected, whether or not it is confirmed, as long as the employee is exposed to TWAs in excess of 85 dB. The AIHA position does not support this recommendation, but rather requires confirmation of the persistence of the ST, as well as consideration of the employee's prior occupational and non-occupational exposure, evaluation of calibration records and the audiometric environment, investigation of related activities and personal medical conditions that could influence the audiometric results, before a hearing loss is presumed to be work related. See page A-714 of the 1987 position statement for a discussion of possible causes of a measured change in hearing, and page A-715 for suggested steps to follow in the determination of work relatedness.

Procedure for listing out STs from the Form 300

It is widely recognized that many occurrences of ST will be temporary in nature. Therefore, it is valuable to identify shifts in hearing while they are still temporary so that follow-up action can be taken before they become permanent. However, it is inappropriate to record such temporary shifts as indicative of the occurrence of occupational illness. Furthermore, companies are usually hesitant to record any incidents on Form 200 (proposed to be Form 300), even if listing out the event at a later date is an option. Therefore, the procedures in the preceding sections are intended to avoid needless recording and line outs. Despite these efforts, line outs may be necessary and should be permitted with the following stipulation:

• At the discretion of the reviewing professional, within 15 months of the initial identification of the ST, any STSs which are not confirmed by
subsequent retesting or otherwise found to be gross work-related may be fined out on Form 300. Document justification and line outs must be provided and should be retained with the employees' records.

The 15-month time frame was selected since employers are only required to test hearing on an annual basis, and thus the recommended time frame should provide sufficient opportunity and leeway to apply the results of a succeeding annual test to the final determination of persistence and work-relatedness.

Response to OSHA queries
Implicit in the AIHA position are answers to other OSHA questions.

- The recommended recording criterion is 10 dB for reasons described in the 1987 position paper and in attachment #2. In brief, AIHA disagrees with OSHA's assertion that an extra 5-dB allowance is needed to account for audiometric variability. The AIHA guidelines for evaluating work-relatedness take audiometric criteria into account, and other factors such as audiometric errors occur infrequently and should be avoided. Random measurement variability can be reduced through retesting, and AIHA recommends that only persistent confirmed shifts be recorded as minimizes this problem. It is unfair to allow additional free hearing loss among employees in hearing conservation programs with stable data in order to account for data deficiencies in poorer programs.

- Baselines for Form 300 should either be the original audiogram or the revised baseline (as defined in 1910.95(e)(9)). Although the OSHA criteria for revising baseline audiograms are general in nature, allowing a wide latitude of professional judgment, the results of a five-year effort of an ad hoc committee of the National Hearing Conservation Association (NHCA, March 1986) have recently resulted in specific consensus professional guidelines for baseline revision, that merit consideration.

- Presbycusis corrections should be permitted as described in the 1987 AIHA paper.

Supporting technical Information
Dr. Julia Royster has applied the calculation procedures of ANSI S3.44-1996 to compute expected hearing loss resulting for typical occupational noise exposures, and she working with Mr. Andrew Steward, has also analyzed a number of industrial audiometric data bases. Their observations and conclusions, (supporting document #2 and #3), substantiate the recommendations described above.

Supporting Documents:
(2) Technical comments provided by Dr. Julia Royster, Environmental Noise Consultants, Inc.
(3) Technical comments provided by Dr. Andrew Steward, ELB Associates.

New ANSI Standards Available
Two revised and one new ANSI standards are now available for purchase. The following is the name and brief description of each standard. For ordering information, please contact: Standards Secretariat, Acoustical Society of America, 120 Wall Street, 32nd Floor, New York, NY 10005-3993; phone 212/248-0373, fax 212/248-0146.

ANSI S3.6-1996 Specification for Audiometers. A revision of S3.6-1989. The standard contains specification of audiometer types, including high-frequency audiometers. Further, the standard lists reference threshold levels for supra-aural earphones, insert earphones, bore conduction, sound-field, and high-frequency and specifies narrow-band levels.

ANSI S3.22-1996 Specification of Hearing Aid Characteristics. A revision of S3.2-1987. The standard describes hearing aid hearing aid measurements including several new sections one of which is measuring telecoil responsive work groups. Chair, David Pressey.

ANSI S3.44-1996 Determination of Occupational Noise Exposure and Estimation of Noise-Induced Hearing Impairment. This is a new ANSI standard. The abstract is as follows: "The standard is an adaptation of the International Standards Organization (ISO) 1996:1990(E). Unlike the ISO standard, this standard allows assessment of noise exposure using a time/intensity trading relation other than a 3-decibel increase per halving of exposure time. This standard presents, in statistical terms, the relationship between noise exposures and changes in hearing threshold levels for noise-exposed populations. This standard may be revised to the calculation of the risk of incurring hearing handicap from sustained daily exposure to noise. Guidance is provided as to the measurement of noise exposure." (Work Group Chair, Dan Johnson)

International Standards on the Internet
Copies of standards are available through an electronic information service from the International Standards Organization (ISO) via the Internet World Wide Web. To access the standards via the WWW users have a couple of options:

1) connect to the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) — http://www.iso.ch
2) link via the service from the ANSI WWW address — http://www.ansi.org/hm.html.

Hard copies of ANSI, ISO, or IEC standards are also available from ANSI Customer Service, 11 West 42nd Street, New York, NY 10036; phone 212/642-4000, fax 212/802-1386.
Help Wanted

Audiologist/OHC wanted for growing Industrial Hearing Conservation Program. Experience and knowledge of noise testing all aspects of hearing conservation programs, account maintenance, computer database, marketing, vehicle service, etc. Substantial travel required. Audiologist would also perform clinical work. Need to have excellent P/T skills, organized and professional. Salary based on experience, benefits, profit sharing. Start date flexible — end 1996 or beginning 1997. Contact Rieder Hearing Clinic, 2360, 1537 Avenue D, Billings, MT 59102, (406) 245-6393. Contact: Betty Jean Dutton

The Update publishes job opportunities in the field of hearing conservation from both employers and employees. If you are an employer and would like to advertise an available position, please send your classified ad in writing with a $15 check or money order to CAOHIC, N/E Wells Street, Milwaukee, WI 53202-3316.

Seeking Employment

Sharon D. Miller, OHC, seeking a position performing on-site occupational health testing in the Oklahoma area. Contact the CAOHIC office for further information.

Joan H. Smith, RT/OHC, would like to assist employers with hearing conservation programs in the Southwestern area of Florida. Contact the CAOHIC office for further information.

If you are an OHC looking for employment, please send a cover letter and your most recent resume. There is no charge to certified OHCs for this service.

Lechner Becomes CAOHIC Coordinator

Barbara Lechner joined CAHC in December 1995 as Administrative Coordinator, serving as staff contact for Course Directors and Occupational Hearing Conservationists. She handles phone calls from individuals seeking information about their certification as well as processing all certification and recertification applications. Ms. Lechner is also the staff liaison to the Screening Committee, which reviews all applications for new and recertifying Course Directors. Previously, Ms. Lechner was an Account Manager working with marketing and sales concerns for privately owned companies in Illinois and Wisconsin. Please call Ms. Lechner at (414) 276-5338 with questions you may have about CAHC.

CAOHIC Comments

- Thank you for your response to the address update form. We included it in the last issue of the Update. It is vital to keep the CAOHIC office informed of any changes to your name, address, phone number or degrees/certificates. Otherwise, we won't be able to keep you informed of industry information or notify you when it is time for recertification. You can call, write or fax this office anytime with those changes.

- One of our Course Directors let CAOHIC know how pleased she is to have the CAOHIC Hearing Conservation Manual, 3rd Edition, as a textbook for presentations in CAOHIC courses. This comment, combined with the rave reviews from the fourteen participants is a strong indication that CAOHIC is effectively supporting both, leadership instruction and student comprehension. "...thanks to the CAOHIC Directors for making our job easy and rewarding."

CAOHIC Quiz

1. Sound can travel in air and water, but not in solids. (True or False)

2. Explain the difference between NIOSH and OSHA.

3. How soon after the beginning of an employee's noise exposure must the baseline audiogram be performed? When is the best time to perform the baseline?

4. How often do noise-exposed employees need to be trained? Does all of the training need to be carried out at the same time?

5. If an employee's audiogram shows an STS and a retest is performed, the retest must be done within _____ days of the initial audiogram.

ANSWERS

1. True

2. NIOSH is a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. OSHA is an arm of the U.S. Department of Labor.

3. The baseline audiogram must be performed within 30 days of the employee's first exposure to noise. The best time to perform the baseline is at the time of the employee's first exposure to noise.

4. The training should be conducted at least annually. It is not necessary for all training to be carried out at the same time.

5. If an employee's audiogram shows an STS and a retest is performed, the retest must be done within 30 days of the initial audiogram.
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