

University of Wisconsin La Crosse Environmental Health and Safety Policy

Subject: Hearing Conservation Program
Last Updated: June 2021
Original: March 1998

I. APPLICABLE DOCUMENTS

29 CFR 1910.95, OSHA Hearing Conservation Program Standard

II. PURPOSE

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has established limits for occupational noise exposure. This regulation defines the limit, or action level, as an eight-hour time weighted average of 85 decibels on the A weighted scale (dB(A)). When noise levels exceed this amount, an effective hearing conservation program is required. Implementation requirements include engineering controls, administrative controls, hearing tests, training, personal protective equipment, and noise monitoring.

This policy identifies the procedures for management of the Hearing Conservation Program at the University of Wisconsin La Crosse (UWL). It was developed to provide a work environment that manages noise exposure to prevent employees from being exposed to hazardous noise levels. This Policy is intended to ensure compliance with Federal and State regulations.

III. SCOPE AND POLICY

This hearing conservation program (HCP) requires UWL to utilize a variety of practices to minimize noise levels below 85 dB(A) averaged over an 8-hour work day, or a dose of fifty percent if the employee work schedule is greater than 8 hours per day.

IV. DEFINITIONS

Audiogram - A chart, graph, or table resulting from an Audiometric Test, showing individual hearing threshold levels as a function of frequency. The audiometric test is also known as a hearing test.

Decibel - Unit of measurement for sound intensity.

dB(A) - Sound intensity measured in decibels on the A-weighted, slow response scale of an approved Sound Level Meter or dosimeter. The dB(A) scale is used because it is approximately equal to the sounds we can actually hear.

Dosimeter - Integrating sound level meter providing an average dose for a given time period.

Extended Shift - Work period extending beyond 8 hours per day.

Impulse Noise - A short term, noncontinuous noise.

Noise - Any unwanted sound

Sound Level Meter (SLM) - An instrument used to measure sound pressure levels.

Standard Threshold Shift (STS) - Change in hearing threshold relative to the baseline audiogram of an average of 10 dB or more at 2000, 3000, and 4000 Hz in either ear.

Time Weighted Average (TWA) Sound Level – That sound level, which if constant over an 8-hour exposure, would result in the same noise dose as is measured.

V. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Responsibilities

1. Develop and provide overall administrative guidance for the Hearing Conservation Program (HCP), including interpretation of the regulations when clarification is required.
2. Conduct noise and dosimeter surveys and maintain survey records.
3. Make recommendations regarding possible engineering and/or administrative controls.
4. Post signs identifying areas where hearing protection is required.
5. Provide training and maintain training records.
6. Provide a report to affected management/supervisors regarding noise survey results.
7. Provide personal noise dosimeter report to individuals who are monitored and their supervisor.
8. Coordinate provision of audiometric exams, by a qualified healthcare provider, to individuals working at or above 85 dB(A) averaged over an 8-hour work day, or a dose of fifty percent if the employee work schedule is greater than 8 hours per day.
9. Coordinate notification of audiometric results.

B. Department Chair, Manager, Supervisor Responsibilities

1. Require individuals in the HCP to annually report to the designated healthcare professional for baseline, annual, and termination audiometric examinations.
2. Inform UWL employees who are exposed above an 8 hour TWA of 85 dB(A), of their present exposure level.
3. Ensure that affected individuals at UWL wear their protective equipment when required.
4. Notify EHS of any employee additions or deletions from staff who must receive an annual audiogram and training.
5. Take initiative to reduce noise exposure as part equipment purchasing, engineering controls, and administrative means.

C. Employees Participating in the HCP Responsibilities

1. Report to the designated healthcare professional for baseline, annual, and termination audiometric examinations.
2. Use the hearing protective equipment as demonstrated in training.
3. Maintain reusable hearing protective equipment through proper cleaning and storage. Properly discard disposable protective equipment.
4. Report changes in the work environment which may alter the current noise levels.
5. Report deficiencies in protective equipment, storage areas, or medical problems resulting from use of hearing protection.
6. Assist with design and implementation of engineering or administrative controls for reducing excessive noise levels.
7. Use installed engineering and administrative noise controls.

VI. CONTROLS

As feasible, UWL will take actions to minimize noise levels below 85 dB(A) averaged over an 8-hour work day, or a dose of fifty percent if the employee work schedule is greater than 8 hours per day. If such

controls fail to reduce sound levels within the level of the standard stated above, personal protective equipment shall be provided.

VII. NOISE SURVEYS/DOSIMETRY

Noise surveys and noise dosimetry will be conducted by EHS. All dosimetry results will be communicated to the employee that wore the device and their supervisor. The supervisor is responsible for communicating data with other employees who may be exposed at or above the action level.

Periodic noise surveys will be conducted in areas not presently included in the HCP when these areas are suspected to be at or above 85 dB(A) for 8 hour work shifts, or a dose of fifty percent if employee work schedule is greater than 8 hours per day. Dosimetry will be conducted in a manner to evaluate a representative number of the exposed employee population in the work area. Monitoring will be repeated whenever a change in production, process, equipment, or controls increases noise exposures.

VIII. AUDIOGRAMS

A qualified healthcare professional will provide audiometric testing to each employee whose exposure equals or exceeds an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels, or a dose of fifty percent if employee work schedule is greater than 8 hours per day. These tests will be done at the following times.

- A. Entrance audiograms are completed within 6 months of an employee's first exposure at or above the exposure limit.
- B. Annual audiograms must be completed if the employee continues to work at or above the exposure limit.
- C. Exit audiograms are completed when an employee ceases to have noise exposure at or above the exposure limit.

IX. HEARING PROTECTORS

Hearing protection will be made available to all UWL employees. Hearing protection will be issued according to the following two categories.

A. Required

- 1. Noise exposure is 85 dB(A) or greater for an 8 hour work day.
- 2. Noise exposure is 83.4 dB(A) or greater for a 10 hour work day.
- 3. Noise exposure is 82.1 dB(A) or greater for a 12 hour work day.

B. Available

- 1. Whenever requested by UWL employees.

There are several types of hearing protection available. Each type offers features to be taken into consideration prior to selecting the protection that is right for the job and the individual. EHS provides guidance with proper equipment selection.

X. TRAINING

All employees included in the HCP must receive training on an annual basis. The training will include the following items.

- A. The effects of noise on hearing.
- B. The purpose of hearing protectors, the advantages, disadvantages, and attenuation of various types, and instructions on selection, fitting, use, and care.
- C. The purpose of audiometric testing, and an explanation of the test procedures.

XI. APPROVAL

The Hearing Conservation Program is effective immediately. All UWL employees shall fulfill their responsibilities as designated within this written policy.