# Are you Listening? Preventing Noise Induced Hearing Loss




## What’s At Stake ?

Many of the machines you operate, tasks you perform, and areas where you work generate too much noise. As a result, noise, or excessive sound, is one of the biggest workplace health problems. Millions of workers are exposed to damaging noise every day; and hearing loss represents a significant percentage of all work-related illnesses.

## What’s The Danger ?

Exposure to high levels of noise can cause permanent hearing loss. Neither surgery nor a hearing aid can help correct this type of hearing loss. Short-term exposure to loud noise can also cause a temporary change in hearing—your ears may feel stuffed up, for example—or you might hear a ringing in your ears, called tinnitus.

These short-term problems may go away within a few minutes or hours after leaving the noise. However, repeated exposures to loud noise can lead to permanent tinnitus and/or hearing loss.

Loud noise also causes an increase in stress levels and makes it harder to concentrate, which can lead to distraction, an increase in errors and lead to accidents and injuries.

Hearing loss can interfere with hearing and understanding of directions, warnings and alarms, along with your ability to communicate with your co-workers. This can put you and your co-workers at increased risk for accidents and injuries.

## How to Protect Yourself

First, learn how to recognize when an area is too loud.

- If you have to shout to have a conversation with a person three feet or one metre away from you, the area is likely too loud and hearing protection should be worn.
- You hear a ringing or humming in your ears after you leave work that could last a few minutes or several hours, depending on the noise level.
- You experience temporary hearing loss when you leave work. Sounds are muffled or you may not be able to hear at all for a period of time; or you have to turn up

the radio on the way home, or TV once you get home, to understand what is being said or hear the music.

Second, always wear hearing protection every time you are in a high-noise area. Your employer should recommend and provide options for hearing protection, including different styles of earplugs, canal caps and ear muffs. It is your responsibility to wear and care for your PPE according to the training provided by your employer.

Finally, recognize the signs of hearing loss and speak to your supervisor immediately if you experience any of them. They include:

- Difficulty hearing higher-pitched voices or sounds.
- Difficulty hearing and understanding what people are saying in places with a lot of background noise, like restaurants or parties, for example.
- In normal conversation, you hear someone speaking but the words seem muffled or you have to ask them to repeat themselves often.
- You have to turn up the TV or radio to hear as clearly as you used to.
- Ringing, roaring, hissing or buzzing in the ear, as well as ear pain, itching or irritation.
- Finally, vertigo, or feeling as though you are spinning, could be a sign of hearing damage.

## FINAL WORD

While noise-induced hearing loss affects millions of workers, it doesn’t have to. It is **entirely** preventable if you work smart and wear your hearing protection every time you are in a high-noise area.