

Noise Exposure toolbox talk

A simple, 5 minute outline of what to cover in a toolbox talk on Noise Exposure.



[Download a Noise Exposure toolbox talk pdf](#)

Exposure to hazardous noise at work or at home can lead to permanent hearing loss or Tinnitus (ringing in the ear). The damage can result from short exposure to loud noises or prolonged exposure to lower levels of noise. Hearing loss can also result from exposure to ototoxic substances which are chemicals that can cause hearing loss or tinnitus. It is important to understand how loud is too loud and how to protect yourself from harm.

Why run a Noise Exposure Toolbox Talk?

- Understand how damage to hearing can occur.
- Identify how to prevent hearing loss
- Ensure we understand our responsibilities around exposure to hazardous noise

How loud is too loud?

Damage to hearing can occur if we are typically exposed to noise above 80 - 85 decibels over an 8-hour shift, or one-off bursts of noise of 140 decibels or more. (note: these levels can vary in different countries)

Typical decibels ratings for some common sounds are as follows:

- Normal conversation- 60 decibels
- Heavy city traffic- 85 decibels
- Motorcycles- 95 decibels
- Circular saw- 100-105 decibels
- Listening to music with headphones at maximum volume- 105 decibels

- Sirens- 120 decibels
- Firearms- 150 decibels

Understanding the levels of noise

Workplaces should carry out noise exposure monitoring to understand the scale of the hazard, identify the source of the noise, to work out what controls are needed and to check whether controls are working.

How can we prevent hearing damage?

- The best way to prevent hearing loss is to eliminate the damaging noise or distance yourself from the noise.
- If this isn't possible, the next best thing is to use engineering controls such as sound barriers, enclosures and noise dampening measures.
- Other aspects that can be considered are: training on hearing protection, warning signage on noisy machines and job rotation to reduce the time working in noisy environments. Talk in your teams about how excessive noise can be reduced.
- The last line of defence is hearing protection (muffs or ear plugs). Ensure the correct class of protection is supplied when the noise level is considered.
- Anyone issued with ear plugs or earmuffs should be trained on how to use them and look after and maintain them.

Hearing Tests

- Annual hearing tests should be carried out if daily exposure is exceeded for the workplace. (In New Zealand this is 85 decibels over the work day or noise peaks of over 140 decibels.)

Key takeaways:

- *Understand what levels of noise can damage your hearing*
- *Understand the levels of noise you are exposed to and for how long*
- *Discuss ways to reduce exposure to hazardous noise*
- *Wear the right hearing protection and understand how to look after it*
- *Remember: Once it's gone, it's gone !!!*

[See all our toolbox talk topics here](#)

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