

Hearing Conservation Webinar Q&A

Joel Blanchard, MD, OccMed Enterprise Medical Director

Learn how to protect your employees' hearing and avoid a noise citation from the U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

How many people are allowed in Sanford Health's hearing testing trailer?

Last year, capacity in the hearing testing trailer was limited to less than six people at a time due to COVID-19 concerns. We've now lifted these restrictions and can test six workers at once.

What triggers the need for noise testing? When do employers need to establish a hearing program?

According to guidelines from OSHA, employers must establish a hearing conservation program based on the noise level an employee is exposed to. If the employee is exposed to noise that equals or exceeds an eight-hour time-weighted average sound level of 85 decibels, your workplace needs a hearing conservation program.

What does a weighted eight-hour work shift mean?

An eight-hour time-weighted average helps determine what noise level an employee is exposed to during their workday. If their shift is longer than eight hours, then the calculation will be adjusted accordingly. Learn more about how OSHA calculates noise level exposure.

Does workers' compensation accept hearing loss claims?

Yes. Hearing loss is a compensable work-related injury.

Would heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) noises typically be a cause for concern?

All noises in a workplace contribute to the overall noise level exposure. Even if the HVAC does not exceed 85 decibels of noise, it adds to the overall noise level.

How often does OSHA require an employer conduct noise level sampling with dose meters?

The OSHA standard doesn't specifically mandate noise level sampling at regular intervals. It's best practice to repeat noise level sampling if there's been a change that affects noise level exposure for your employees.

What constitutes a Standard Threshold Shift (STS) according to OSHA?

For both OSHA and Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) an STS is a loss of hearing equal to or exceeding 10 decibels as compared to the baseline audiogram.

Recordability

OSHA: Once an STS has been found, it is considered recordable if the average hearing loss at 2000, 3000 and 4000 Hz totals 25 decibels or more. It is not related to baseline.

MSHA: Once an STS has been found, it is considered recordable if the average hearing loss at 2000, 3000 and 4000 Hz is 25 decibels worse than the baseline average hearing loss at 2000, 3000 and 4000 Hz.