



# Hearing Conservation at Work

## Occupational Deafness is....

The sensorial hair cells of the inner ear will be damaged when exposed to noisy working environment continuously for a long period of time. The degree of detriment is proportional to the intensity of the noise. These hair cells cannot recover once damaged in this way, leading to permanent hearing impairment. Therefore, occupational deafness is incurable and prevention is the only way to protect the hearing capacity of those working in noisy occupations.

## Hearing Impairment ....

### Early symptoms

Different from sudden hearing loss due to occupational injury or other accident, the loss of hearing capacity resulting from occupational deafness will be worsened gradually. One should pay attention if the following symptoms appear:

- Continuous tinnitus (ringing or roaring noise) in the ear
- Listening difficulty, when communicating with others or on the phone
- Need to raise the volume of the radio or TV
- Hard to concentrate
- Insomnia

### Impact of Noise on Health

- Causing tinnitus, temporary hearing loss or permanent hearing loss
- Feeling dizzy, headache, insomnia, fatigue, irritation and psychological pressure
- Affecting heart rate and blood pressure
- Causing poor appetite or dyspepsia

## Responsibility of Employers

### ● Assessment of Noise Level at Workplace

The Factories and Industrial Undertakings (Noise at Work) Regulation states that where machines or tools producing high level of noise are in use in any industrial undertakings, the employer shall appoint a qualified person to carry out a noise assessment for the purpose of evaluating the impact of noise to the employees. Where appropriate, ear protection zone should be properly demarcated. For construction sites, the employer should appoint a qualified person to carry out a noise assessment and to specify that employees should wear ear protector within a distance from the source of noise.

- Reduce Noise at the Source

To use less noisy machines and to properly maintain them on a regular basis to reduce the high level of noise generated by the impact or vibration of the machine parts.

- Control Noise Transmission

To isolate the noise sources by putting up suitable noise absorbing or soundproofing installation (such as silencer or acoustic enclosure) where necessary. At the same time, a reasonable work schedule should be implemented to minimize the time that employees would be exposed to noise.

- Personal Ear Protectors

To provide suitable and approved ear protectors to employees in accordance with the nature of their work, and encourage proper use of such by giving employees relevant information or training.

- Regular Hearing Test

To identify hearing damage at its earliest stage, employees should be arranged to attend regular hearing tests, so that suitable preventive or remedial measures could be taken.

## **Responsibility of Employees**

- Proper Use of Noise Control Equipment

When working with machines installed with noise silencer or acoustic enclosure, one should ensure that these installations are working properly. One should also report immediately to the employer or supervisor if any defect of such equipment or ear protectors is detected, so that repair or replacement can be made.

- Wear and Maintain Ear Protectors

To follow the employer's instruction to wear suitable and approved ear protectors, and keep them in good condition and hygiene. Damaged or contaminated equipment may cause ear infection.

- Taking Care of Your Hearing

To seek medical consultation immediately if hearing problem is found and take proper hearing protective measures. The Occupational Health Clinic of the Labour Department, and the Ear, Nose and Throat clinics under the Hospital Authority are offering hearing test and medical examination at reasonable fee.

## **Types of Ear Protectors and Their Use**

There are two main types of ear protectors: ear plug and ear muff. Only ear protectors that are approved by the Commissioner of Labour should be used. For details of the approved ear protectors, please contact the Occupational Safety and Health Branch of the Labour Department.

Ear Muff is easy to use and suitable for those working most of their time in and out noisy environment. To wear it properly, both ears shall be covered completely by the muffs as below:



There are two types of ear plug: re-useable and disposable. One shall be aware of personal hygiene each time when wearing ear plug. It is important to keep the re-useable ear plug clean. The proper method of wearing an ear plug is to pull one ear upward and backward by the hand of other side over and behind the head, then insert the ear plug inside the ear carefully as below:



**Caution:** When using ear muff or ear plug, it is crucial not to affect the user from hearing emergency signals. Cotton ball or headphone cannot be used in place of ear muff or ear plug.

## **Related Organizations**

- 1 Labour Department – Occupational Safety and Health Branch  
Website: [www.labour.gov.hk/eng/osh/](http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/osh/)  
Tel: 2559 2297
  
- 2 Labour Department – Occupational Health Clinic  
Tel: 2343 7133 (Kwun Tong)  
Tel: 2543 5701 (Fanling)
  
- 3 Hospital Authority  
Website: [www.ha.org.hk](http://www.ha.org.hk)  
Tel: 2300 6555
  
- 4 Occupational Safety and Health Council  
Website: [www.oshc.org.hk](http://www.oshc.org.hk)  
Tel: 2739 9000

## **Enquiries**

Please contact the Occupational Deafness Compensation Board for further information.

**Address: Office A-B, 15/F, Billion Plaza II  
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Cheung Sha Wan  
Kowloon**

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