

Are there a lot of companies that have to comply with the OSHA regulations for a hearing conservation program?

According to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), approximately 30 million industrial workers are exposed to high levels of noise in the work place. Because the human ear has no mechanism to block out unwanted noise, continued exposure to high-level noise may cause permanent hearing loss.

- *Trivia & Facts* OSHA fined the Bud Co. Of Philadelphia \$2.7 million in December 1989 for 539 alleged violations related to noise.

Your company may fall under the OSHA requirement guidelines to have a conservation program administered to your employees.

If your company is involved in a Hearing Conservation program, it will protect your employees and allow your company to comply with the federal government's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards. At the Audiology Center we provide the service of noise studies to determine if the noise level is at or above 85 dBA over a constant period of eight-hours. If your company is compatible with 85 dBA over the time weighted average, employees are required to be included in a hearing conservation program. With noise levels at 85 dBA, employees are strongly advised to wear hearing protection as part of their hearing conservation program. On the other hand, noise levels at or above 90 dBA mandate that hearing protection be worn.

The program includes:

1. Noise Monitoring
 2. Employee training (education)
 3. Hearing tests (via Mobile unit)
 4. Hearing protection (if provided)
 5. Record keeping (A Hearing conservation notebook)
- *Trivia & Facts* NIOSH predicts that one in four workers exposed to high levels of noise in the workplace will develop a hearing loss.

What does OSHA stand for?

This stands for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in the labor department. OSHA is a regulating administrative agency to guide companies to a safer working environment. It is up to the company to find the program that works best for them. As stated prior these are the guidelines that set the foundation to a successful hearing conservation program

Basic Components of a Hearing Conservation Program as defined by OSHA.

- *Noise Exposure Monitoring*
- *Engineering And Administrative Controls*
 - *Audiometric Evaluation*
- *Use of Hearing Protection Devices*
 - *Education and Motivation*
 - *Record Keeping*
 - *Program Evaluation*

What exactly do these basic components mean?

- **Noise exposure monitoring** *The purpose of noise monitoring is to determine if a Hearing Conservation Program is required and to determine who is to be included in the program. Management should define the goals of the sound survey and ensure that the procedures along with resources are available for the collection and evaluation of data.*
- **Engineering and Administrative Controls** *Engineering controls are administered to the areas that exceed the allowed noise levels set forth by OSHA. Management needs to coordinate the procedures that correspond to noise exposure.*

Example

1. *Quiet lunch and break rooms.*
 2. *Explore and schedule sound reducing techniques for the indicated areas established by the noise study.*
 3. *Communication among the equipment operators and management needs to be open in case of a change in noise.*
- **Audiometric Evaluation** *This is absolutely the most crucial in the success of the HCP (Hearing Conservation Program). It is the only way to determine if noise induced hearing loss is being prevented by the present program. Management should coordinate the sufficient time needed to allow audiometric technicians to test the employees at hand. Questions are used to determine prior noise exposure that may result in that employee's audiometric test results.*
 - **Hearing Protection Devices** *Hearing protectors are in most cases the only way to prevent dangerous noise levels from affecting one's hearing. As mentioned prior it is up to the company to decide in the procedures needed to facilitate the appropriate conservation program. The implementers of the program need to be knowledgeable in the details that coincide with evaluation, selection, and use of the hearing protection. The implementers should also take note of the condition and performance of the hearing protectors. However, the employees must take the responsibility for being educated on the matters that pertain to the program. Communicating problems or changes are crucial in programs of this format.*
 - **Education and motivation** *Education and motivation are offered to the management and the employees. This allows them to fully understand that HCP takes time, communication, and cooperation. Employees should ask questions and suggest alternatives to the problems at hand.*
 - **Record Keeping** *Sufficient record keeping is ensured by a consistent approach. Every part of the HCP will create its own type of records. Information needs to be filed and processed in an adequate manner.*