The University of Texas at El Paso

Hearing Conservation Program

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Hearing Conservation Program is to provide information for the protection of UTEP employees from long-term hearing loss associated with noise levels in the workplace in compliance with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Standard 29 CFR Part 1910.95 Occupational Noise Exposure.

HEARING CONSERVATION PROGRAM

All University employees whose noise exposure equals or exceeds an 8-hour time weighted average (TWA) of 85 decibels will be enrolled in a hearing conservation program. The program includes:

- Workplace evaluations
- Exposure assessment
- Audiometric testing as necessary
- Administrative controls
- Annual training on noise exposure

If engineering and administrative controls are determined as infeasible, UTEP employees may use hearing protection as part of the personal protective equipment.

The University of Texas at El Paso

Hearing Conservation Program

1. Introduction
    1.1. The aim of the program is to ensure that The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) personnel exposed to high noise levels get the appropriate protection and training. Exposure to excessive noise in the workplace may cause permanent hearing loss. The Hearing Conservation Program has been established to help ensure that UTEP employees do not suffer health effects from exposure to excessive noise at work.
    1.2. This program applies to all UTEP employees, due to the nature of their work, are required to participate in the hearing protection.

2. Objectives
    2.1. To identify work areas or tasks that generate high noise levels.
    2.2. To identify employees potentially to be exposed to high noise levels.
    2.3. To reduce worker exposure to noise by implementing engineering or administrative controls.
    2.4. To provide supervisors and employees with recommendations for personal protective equipment to decrease noise below the action level when engineering or administrative control is infeasible.
    2.5. To train employees working in high noise areas on the effects of high noise exposure on hearing and on the proper use of hearing protection devices.
    2.6. Enter employees in medical surveillance as needed to ensure adequate hearing protection.

3. EXPOSURE LIMITS

    This program follows the requirements of The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) hearing conservation standard. Under this program, UTEP informs employees about protection against the effects of noise exposure when sound levels exceed an 8-hour time weighted average (TWA) of 85 decibels (A-scale (dBA), slow response).

4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1. Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S)

EH&S will provide employee training, regular program and program elements review, and noise assessments.

EH&S is responsible for referring employees for medical evaluations as necessary, including audiometric testing.

EH&S is responsible for recommending the type of hearing protection required to decrease the noise level below 85dBA and provide periodic training.

4.2. Individual departments

Each department is responsible for purchasing and maintaining its hearing protection equipment, as recommended by EH&S.

Departments are responsible for notifying EH&S of employees that need to be considered to be in the hearing conservation program.

4.3. Supervisors

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that their employees have the time to complete all required training and medical evaluations.

4.4. Employees

Employees in the program are responsible for complying with all appropriate guidance as to when to wear hearing protection.

5. HEARING PROTECTION PLAN ELEMENTS

5.1. EXPOSURE MONITORING

5.1.1 EH&S will determine the need for hearing protection by reviewing job descriptions, task analyses, individual noise dosimetry for work operations, and work area noise monitoring.

- Re-monitoring if a change in equipment, process, or controls increase the noise level.

5.1.2 EH&S will assess the implementation of administrative and engineering controls to decrease noise levels and reduce exposure.

5.1.3 If engineering and administrative controls are determined as infeasible, employees exposed to noise levels exceeding an 8-hour, time-weighted average of 85 dBA shall be included in the hearing conservation program.

5.2. AUDIOMETRIC TESTING

All employees exposed to noise at or above the action level of 85 dBA for an 8-hour TWA assessment, must participate in the hearing conservation program. This program consists of:

a. Baseline audiogram- establishes a reference point for future audiograms.
b. Employees must be retested annually if they are exposed at or above the 85 dBA for an 8-hour TWA limit. The results of each employee's annual audiogram must be compared with the baseline audiogram to determine if the employee's hearing has changed. The employee will be notified of the finding.
c. A health care professional will review audiometric testing. The healthcare professional will determine if further evaluation or retraining is needed.

5.3. CONTROL MEASURES

5.3.1 Engineering controls

Engineering controls are any modification or replacement of equipment or related physical change at the noise source or along the transmission path that reduces the noise level at the employee's ear. If an assessment indicates that employees are exposed to noise levels greater than or equal to the action level, engineering controls should be considered first to reduce noise exposure. Engineering controls may include:

- Relocation of noisy equipment.
- Sound barriers and substitution of equipment and materials [1].

5.3.2. Administrative controls

Administrative controls are changes in the workplace that decrease or eliminate exposure to noise. Examples include:

- Limiting the amount of time an employee spends at a noise source.
- Restricting worker presence to a suitable distance away from noisy equipment.

5.3.3. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

When engineering and administrative controls are determined as unfeasible, employees must use hearing protection as part of the mandatory personal protective equipment. Employees required to wear hearing protection will receive training on why and when hearing protection is necessary, how to select the proper device, how to wear them correctly, and how to maintain them. Examples include:

- Earplugs
- Earmuffs

Employees who wear hearing protection in areas that are below 85 dBA for an 8-hour TWA are considered voluntary and are not subject to training or medical surveillance [1].

6. EMPLOYEE TRAINING

6.1. Employees who are exposed to noise greater than 85 dBA for an 8-hour TWA, must have annual training that teaches them why sustained 85-decibel noise can damage their hearing, the purpose of the audiometric testing, why they should use hearing protectors, and how to use them properly.

6.2. Training

6.2.1 Annual training is required for individuals exposed to noise levels at or above 85 dBA for an 8-hour TWA. The Environmental Health and Safety Office will train UTEP personnel in the following areas:

- OSHA's Noise Standard and UTEP Hearing Conservation Program.
- Noise hazards and effects on hearing.
- The purpose of hearing protectors, the advantages, disadvantages, and attenuation of various types, and instructions on selection, fitting, use and care.
- Audiometric testing

7. RECORDKEEPING

7.1. Noise exposure measurement records will be maintained according to the University's Record Retention Policy.

8. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

8.1. Employees in the Hearing Protection Program will have access to their exposure monitoring records and audiometric test records.

9. LINKS TO FORMS

Occupational Health Questionnaire
OHP Form

Audiometric Hearing Test Declination Form
Declination Form

Fit for Duty Report
Report

10. CONTACT INFORMATION

Environmental Health and Safety
Email: eh&s@utep.edu
Phone: 915-747-7124

11. REFERENCES

[1] Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (n.d.) Occupational Noise Exposure (Standard 1910.95).