

MAFES Dawg Tracks



December 15, 2008 Safety Tips: Protecting Against Noise



Noise protection seems needless, when you mention this in circles. Some folks think that it is unnecessary, so they resist wearing it.

In most situations, hearing loss isn't a sudden occurrence, but gradually happens over time. You think that everything is fine with your ability to hear and then all of a sudden you realize that you don't hear as well as you once did. Another reason that folks resist wearing hearing protection is that they think that it is uncomfortable.

There are three types of ear plugs that are commonly used and give good protection. They are also comfortable to wear:

- **Formable Plugs –**
This type is spongy and softly compressed or shaped for easy insertion and are expandable to provide a snug fit. They are disposable and are not intended for repeat use.
- **Premolded Plugs –**
These plugs are made of a soft flexible material preformed to fit the ear. They must be fitted or sized for the individual ear. They are designed for reuse, so they have to be washed or cleaned after each use. They are ideally suited for use where they are required for daily use or on a regular basis.
- **Earmuffs –**
Earmuffs are constructed with an adjustable headband and the ear pieces have a soft cushion and cups around the perimeter of the ear piece. Muffs are normally preferred, as they are more comfortable to wear over longer periods.

Eyeglasses should not be worn using ear muffs. Obviously, you won't get a good fit so the protection won't be as effective.

HOW DOES NOISE HURT YOU?

- Too much exposure to loud noises can result in stress, resulting from constantly straining to listen and be heard.
- Noise may prohibit you from listening to important safety and other instructions.
- Prolonged exposure to loud noises can result in permanent hearing loss.
- Exposure to loud noises, even for short periods of time, can result in temporary loss of hearing.

HOW CAN YOU TELL WHEN NOISE IS HURTING YOU?

- If you begin to hear ringing noises or other noises in your ear, have a hard time hearing people that are talking to you, or are unable to hear high pitched or soft sounds.
- If you begin to experience any of the above problems, you need to see a doctor and have your hearing tested.

Sound is measured in decibels. Noise levels of 85 decibels or greater can affect your hearing if you work around it more than eight hours a day. Noise is especially dangerous in the working environments, as it interferes with communication and disrupts the concentration.

Good protection depends on the seal between the surface of the skin and the surface of the protection. Obviously, with a leak, you won't get good protection. Talking and/or chewing can create a leak.

All materials won't block out the same amount of noise or sound. The manufacturer indicates on their product how much sound can be muffled out. This figure is called the "Noise Reduction Rating" (NRR). When you are looking for ear protection, check the label to see that it has a NRR of 25 or more.