MAFES Dawg Tracks

July 14, 2014

Safety Tips: Hearing Protection

In our agriculture environment, noise-related hearing loss joins some other industries in the problem of occupational health concerns. It has been one of the most prevalent heath concerns for the last 25 years.

- ✓ Since 2004, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has reported that approximately 125,000 workers in all industries have suffered significant, permanent hearing loss.
- ✓ In 2009, the BLS, in that year alone, reported 21,000 hearing loss cases.
- ✓ Each year approximately 30 million people in the USA are occupationally exposed to hazardous noise.

Tractors, combines, forage harvesters, silage blowers, chain saws, skid steer loaders, grain dryers, animal noises and guns all can contribute to noise-related problems. Studies have proven that long time exposure to these types of agriculture –related noises will result in hearing loss to the farmers.

Actually, when you lose any degree of your hearing you never regain it. Hearing loss is preventable, if you choose to work at prevention.

TIPS FOR PREVENTION-

- ✓ **Identify noisy tasks** around the farm and shop areas.
- ✓ **Wear hearing protection** anytime you're exposed to loud noises.
- ✓ **Make hearing protection convenient** – When you leave the work or break areas, pick up some ear plugs and put them in your pocket for a "just in case" I need them. Another tip is with ear muffs: Keep a set hanging on the steering column of the tractor or other excessive noise making equipment so that they are easily accessible when needed.
- ✓ **Try to reduce noise levels** – Keeping equipment in good repair, replacing worn parts, regular lubrications and replacing worn out mufflers will go a long way in noise reduction.
- ✓ **Limit exposure** – If you don't need to be where loud noises are happening, stay way. Keep cab doors and windows closed.
- ✓ **Have a hearing test** – If you or someone close to you suspects that there may be a hearing problem, make an appointment with an audiologist to see if there is a problem.

HEARING PROTECTION TIPS-

- Noise that can damage your hearing depends on 3 things- How loud it is, how long you are exposed, and how close you are to the source.
- A rule of thumb – if you have to raise your voice when talking to someone a couple of feet away, the noise is above the trigger level for wearing PPE.
- The type of hearing protection you may need depends on the type of noise hazards you will be facing. The most common types are ear plugs, canal caps and earmuff cups.
- Always wash your hands before inserting earplugs.
- Learn how to use the various types of soft and preformed earplugs. Generally, you pull the ear up and back, then insert the earplug.
- For reusable earplugs, you need to wash them every day and make sure they are dry before you store them.
- Replace the plugs when they get worn, don't fit or hard to clean.

TYPES OF AIDS FOR HEARING PROTECTION-

There are 2 types of hearing protection – ear muffs and ear plugs.

- **Acoustical ear muffs** – These are made to fit over the ear and to provide a sound barrier to the inner ear. Because they do not block all of the sound, conversation for instructional purposes or safety can still be heard. Ear muffs reduce the sound to 20 to 30 decibels.
- **Ear plugs** – Ear plugs are made in a couple of different types.
  ~Preformed rubber or plastic – As these are preformed, they have to be ordered by ear opening size.
  These usually have to be fitted according to the wearer's ear opening**.**
  ~Foam – These are compressed, and when they are inserted in the ear, they expand to cover the entire ear. Ear plugs generally reduce the load level to 26 to 33 decibels. Earplugs work best when you roll the foam cylinder in a small roll and insert it in the ear and hold it until it expands. Ear muffs and ear plugs worn together (at the same time) can add another 3 to 5 decibels of protection.

DO'S & DON'TS OF HEARING PROTECTION-

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DO:

- ***Use earplugs or ear muffs in noisy environments.***
- ***Make sure your ear muffs or ear plugs fit comfortably.***
- ***Clean reusable ear plugs after each use and store them dry for the next use.***
- ***Wash your hands before inserting earplugs or putting on ear muffs.***

DON'T:

- ***Stand too close to noisy machines for a long time.***
- ***Reuse disposable earplugs.***
- ***Share earplugs with other employees.***
- ***Stuff cotton in your ears instead of earplugs- it won't block out the noise and could damage your ears.***

HEARING PROTECTION IS A SOUND INVESTMENT

EARS ARE PRICELESS <> EAR PROTECTIOM IS CHEAP

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MAFES / MSU-ES (662) 566-2201 2/19/2014
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