

First Thursday Safety Topic

April 2019



Lend Me Your Ears!

Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle. - Walt Whitman

Which of the senses would you willingly give up? For me I would rather keep them all. Moreover at my age it is obvious my hearing along with the others is not what it used to be. For many of us there is a natural regression of our senses. We can expect to wear readers for close-up work and in many cases we must depend on the wonderful captions on the television. As the old saying goes, "If I had known I would live this long I would have taken better care."

When it comes to hearing I remember back in 1977 having a pair of ear plugs made for me by my supervisor. These were molded two part putty material that was shoved into my ear to harden and then removed. A little pouch was supplied to keep them in and occasionally we needed to wash them off. As you can imagine these devices were lost from time to time or became damaged. They were not as effective as the modern foam ear plugs, but now as then, ear protection must be worn correctly or they just don't work. Hearing conservation is a serious business and one that we can do something about. This month we are hearing from the world's expert on the topic Brian Felsen.

Let's hear from Brian to learn more...

In my work with organizations I find that there are many people who ignore the reality of hearing loss over a period of time. This is most often due to a lack of understanding and appreciation for our hearing health and how it is connected to our overall wellness. Hearing loss for many may be due to genetics but for most it is a result of the environmental hazard we call noise. In addition, people may think they are safe because they are exposed to OSHA levels that are permissible and then quickly forget that when they get home their ears need to rest and recover.

Sound levels in the workplace may reach and exceed the daily dose threshold established by OSHA and NIOSH, and a worker may be unaware due to the lack of rest time needed to recover, proper use and selection of hearing protection, understanding of

decibel levels, and other variables that can be prevented. Returning to work day after day following an evening of loud noises such as music and television can reduce the recommended rest time for recovery. When the person returns to work after being gone for say a week or two for vacation the noise in the workplace may well be noticed.

Audiometric testing should be conducted annually for any workers exposed to hazardous sound levels as determined by OSHA and NIOSH and completed following a given amount of rest. Research does suggest that in the modern world it is hard to find a place quiet enough to provide the amount of rest time required for a full recovery. An employee who lives in town may find that noise levels at home are high enough to decrease the time allotted. Another employee who lives in the country may find it quiet enough to get the needed rest time except for the fact that they are operating a tractor, chainsaw, or other equipment without proper hearing protection. The latter happens many times because the "safety rules" are different at home.

Hearing conservation is serious business and my greatest passion. As I study the research and work with clients to preserve the hearing of their employees we find many do not comprehend the real hazards. We have a lot of distractions in our lives that create stress and illnesses that are difficult to explain. Many researchers suggest that noise increases stresses on the body that really don't allow for our bodies to heal properly from normal human sicknesses.

In Europe and in the United States float tubs where a person can float in water that is body temperature and in a room that is insulated from outside noises are used to reduce the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in soldiers. Taking this into consideration organizations that work to reduce the hazardous sound levels in the workplace can reduce health costs and likely absenteeism.

Organizations that are dedicated to hearing conservation begin by first looking at the noise levels being produced through dosimetry and sound level meter testing in the workplace. A comprehensive plan, hands-on education, and recordkeeping process

To view a Safety Training Video on this month's topic, go to:

<https://vimeo.com/325875530>

follows to help employees engage in reducing their exposure and understanding how and why they may need to rest their ears when away from the workplace. In addition, the organization works with their procurement department to set standards for noise levels on new equipment so they are continually reducing the noise levels and not increasing them. Personal protective equipment such as ear plugs and earmuffs are continually being used in areas where noise levels cannot be properly abated, but getting individuals to wear them is a continual battle.

Through my work with 3M Personal Safety Division we have worked to provide motivation and training in the area of hearing protection. We have created a customization option to imprint company and team logos on earplugs, and earmuffs to inspire others to want to wear their hearing protection regularly with pride.. This tends to make hearing protection more popular and help individuals be more aware and not wait until they are uncomfortable. Bottom line is that to conserve hearing health, the most common and preventable occupational injury in the world, an organization must educate, motivate, train, validate, and encourage workers to value what can be lost forever so that they can live productive lives in the future.

Brian Felsen is available to help your organization make hearing conservation interesting and fun. If you would like more information about booking Brian into your organization to help improve your hearing safety culture call the Safety Institute at 800.259.6209 or email Nona@safetyinstitute.com



At the Safety Institute we are constantly researching ways to create a workplace where it is difficult to get hurt and I hope this month's 1st Thursday Safety Topic has helped. See you next month.
nona@safetyinstitute.com or call 800.259.6209

NOTES



What's the Hazard?