



Motivating Workers to Participate In Your Hearing Loss Prevention Program

The success of any broad-based company program, whether exclusive to a company or falling under the auspices of OSHA, relies upon the workers' willingness and motivation to participate. One "weak link" in the system may cause initiatives to fall significantly short of expectations or worse simply fail altogether.

A Hearing Loss Prevention Program is a unique program. It is unique because the benefits of the program can be carried from the workplace to off the job venues because noise follows us wherever we go.

The foundation of an effective Hearing Loss Prevention Program must be laid at the highest corporate levels. Many (but not all) managers and supervisors seldom receive noise exposure on a day-to-day basis. Still, their participation in annual hearing conservation training and audiometric testing is vital to the success of the program. Subordinates cannot be expected to participate in a "do as I say and not as I do" environment.

Successful hearing loss prevention is as much a state of mind as it is implementing the use hearing protectors. Successful programs grow out of worker education and training. Through education and training, participants are primed not only to use protection but also recognize situations where protection would be beneficial. For instance, when walking through a plant, a worker's decision to don hearing protection while already halfway through a noisy area defeats the goal and exposes the worker to unnecessary and damaging noise exposure. Successful use of hearing protection requires reasonable foresight and *preparedness*- a trainable attribute.

Hearing protector use enforcement varies from company to company. Enforcement methods are a company's private domain and will remain beyond the scope and purpose of this article. However, we can suggest a few potentially effective strategies developed to instill and *maintain* worker motivation.

- Place hearing loss prevention posters in strategic areas within the workplace:
 - ✓ In lunchrooms.
 - ✓ In close proximity to noisy equipment.
 - ✓ In restroom facilities
 - ✓ At facility entry and exit points.



Many hearing protector manufacturers will provide free posters or materials at less than cost as a marketing incentive.

- Mount hearing protector dispensers throughout accessible areas of the plant, notably at high noise entry points and break rooms. *Ensure that dispensers are functionally maintained and re-stocked!*
- Encourage workers to take hearing protection home for off-the-job noise exposure.

Many companies conduct in-house incentive/reward programs associated with safety. Departments go “head to head” in safety contests with the goal of recording the least number of recordable injuries as possible (hearing conservation is closely monitored since 25 dB shifts (and 10 dB shifts in affected States) must be recorded on the OSHA 200 Log as recordable injuries).

Known institutional incentives have included rewarding a “choice” reserved parking space to the winning team and rotating the space to each member (done in the winter months in northern climates!). Other programs have gone so far as to reward money to well-performing departments.

In the end, successful and effective prevention of noise-induced hearing loss relies on individual self-reliance-*educated self-reliance*.

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