

May 20, 2002



Ways You Can Protect Your Hearing

When it comes to hearing protection, the question is: When have you heard enough? You require hearing protection when you work in an environment with a continuous decibel level greater than 85 decibels. How loud is 85 decibels? A lawnmower, electric drill, table saw, and shop vacuum are all above 85 decibels.

Other factors indicating you need hearing protection are more personal. Would you feel more comfortable with hearing protection? Are you nervous or fatigued, or experience a ringing in your ears after working in a noisy area? Answering yes to any of these questions may indicate you need hearing protection. Some workplaces use this formula as a rule of thumb: If you need to raise your voice to be heard by a co-worker just three feet away, then you need hearing protection. The most reliable way is to have noise measurements conducted by a qualified person to determine actual noise levels.

Once you have determined you may require hearing protection, the next question is how much? The level of noise to which you are exposed is your answer here. Ask your supervisor to test the area where you work. What you require will be based on this level of noise.

Hearing protection devices have a noise reduction rating (**NRR**) placed on their packaging. For example, if you work in an environment where you are exposed to a noise level of 100 decibels, you require hearing protection to bring the level down to 85 decibels or less. Simple subtraction will tell you a (**NRR**) rating of 15 should do the trick. PPE is designed to protect you. If you can't understand what your co-workers are saying, you might have too much hearing protection or the wrong kind. Too much protection will

leave you feeling isolated and at risk of injury because you can't hear machines or your co-workers.

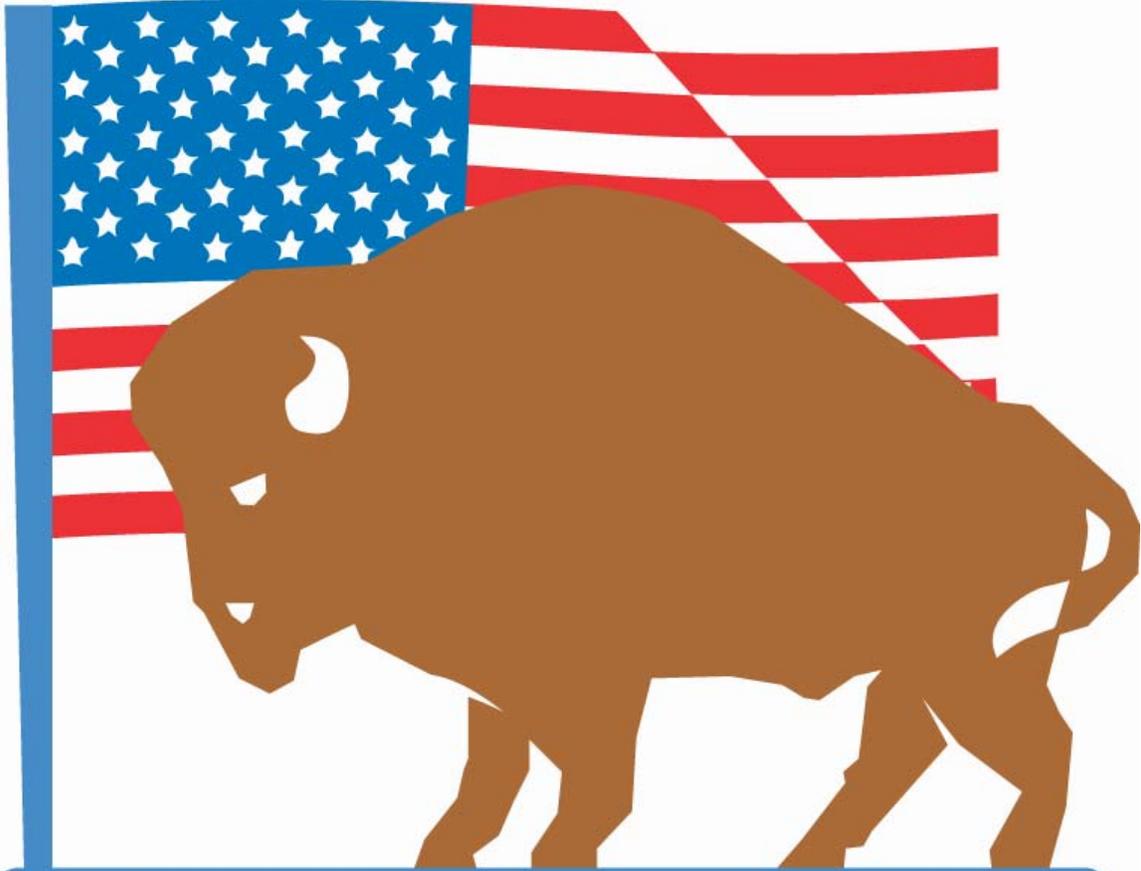
There are many different types of protection designed to limit the amount of noise that reaches the inner ear. Here are several examples. Discuss these options with your supervisor:

Earplugs: the most common type of ear protection, come in different varieties and materials. They are placed in the outer ear and can reduce noise by as much as 30 decibels.

Canal caps: on the other hand, close off the inner ear and are used with a headband or string connecting caps. Caps are most often used when an earplug is not viable.

Earmuffs: fitted with a headband are also a common hearing protection device, earmuffs filter out 15 to 30 decibels of noise. Specialized earmuffs are available that will filter out particular frequencies of noise allowing the user to hear speech. When faced with noise levels above 100 decibels, you should consider a combination of earmuffs and plugs.

Safety Tip: It's important that the hearing protection device you choose fit properly and is kept in proper working condition. Most importantly, you need to wear the device because hearing loss is something you don't notice until it's too late. Remember some people experience hearing loss as they age and so all hearing loss may not be job connected. It is recommended that anytime you are in a noise environment you should wear your hearing PPE to protect your hearing.



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