Audiology
SERVICES IN THE WORKPLACE (HEARING CONSERVATION)

Many Americans work in industries or settings where they are regularly exposed to loud noise, potentially putting their hearing at risk. Audiologists play a key role in developing and implementing hearing conservation programs, which aim to protect workers by preventing hearing loss.

DID YOU KNOW?
In the U.S. workplace, about 22 million workers (17%) are exposed to hazardous noise each year.
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WHO:
Occupational hearing conservation audiologists work with adults. Laws prevent workers under the age of 18 from being employed in hazardous conditions. Community-based hearing conservation programs are designed for people of all ages.

WHAT:
Audiologists may be responsible for assisting employees in ways that include the following:

- Identifying and evaluating noise hazards in the workplace. Audiologists may also provide recommendations for controlling and reducing noise in the work environment.
- Fitting employees for personal hearing protective devices. Options include over-the-ear protectors (earmuffs) and/or in-the-ear protectors (earplugs). Audiologists instruct employees on proper usage of hearing protection.
- Routinely testing the hearing of employees who are exposed to dangerous noise levels. Even those who already have hearing loss should be tested, as their hearing can get worse with new noise exposure.
- Educating employees and management about noise-induced hearing loss. This includes protective measures that an employee can take at work and outside of work (e.g., during leisure activities).
- Maintaining up-to-date knowledge of workplace regulations to protect employees. These regulations are provided at the federal, state, and local levels. Industry-specific regulations may also be available.

WHERE:
Hearing conservation programs are common in the U.S. military and in industries/workplaces where employees are exposed to hazardous noise levels. Examples include the aviation, construction, factory/manufacturing, landscaping/groundskeeping, and mining industries.

HOW:
The Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) is the federal agency that requires employers to implement a hearing conservation program when workers are at risk for noise-induced hearing loss. Additional industry-specific agencies also set standards for hearing conservation.

WHY:
Most work-related hearing loss is permanent. Such hearing loss is often preventable when employees use hearing protection. Left untreated, hearing loss can impact a person’s health (including higher risk of heart disease and cognitive decline), mental health, job success and earnings, on- and off-the-job safety, and quality of life.