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Weekly Safety Tip

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February 22, 2016

SCI Safety Tips: Hearing conservation: Listen up Part 1

Source: <http://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com>

By: Tom Musick

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Imagine a massive rock – bigger than a house. Now, imagine being part of a work crew that has to blast that rock out of the ground and into countless pieces of tiny, crushed rock. Imagine the noise.

“It’s very hard to turn big rocks into little rocks quietly,” said Kelly Bailey, a 36½-year veteran of Birmingham, AL-based Vulcan Materials Co.

Although noise exists, so do solutions. At Vulcan, Bailey has helped the organization garner national recognition for its efforts to prevent occupational hearing loss. As the company’s director of safety, health and environment, Bailey traveled to St. Petersburg, FL, in 2013 to accept the NIOSH Safe-In-Sound Excellence in Hearing Loss Prevention Award.

Bailey’s message to fellow safety professionals is simple: By taking steps to protect your workers from hearing loss, you make your organization safer, stronger and more satisfied.

“Noise is certainly a hazard that you want to have under control,” said Bailey, whose organization employs about 7,000 workers in 19 states, the District of Columbia, the Bahamas and Mexico. “That’s why the exposure monitoring program is so important.

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James Lehrke-SCI

You need an army to address it. We try to get as many levels of our employment involved in the monitoring aspect and the controlling aspect.”

Defining the issue

According to OSHA, approximately 30 million workers are exposed to hazardous noise every year in the United States. Thousands of those workers sustain hearing loss because of noise exposure. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that, since 2004, about 125,000 U.S. workers have reported “significant, permanent hearing loss” associated with their jobs.

Temporary hearing loss because of short-term noise exposure may be addressed with proper rest, but permanent hearing loss can’t be reversed. People who lose hearing often deal with psychological and social effects such as frustration, feelings of isolation and stress. Ramifications extend into the workplace, where a worker with hearing issues might not recognize an alarm or a warning from a colleague.

“Hearing loss itself is considered a health issue,” said Dr. Amanda Azman, a NIOSH research audiologist with the Pittsburgh Mining Research Division. “It’s a negative health outcome of certain activities, but it leads to a safety issue in the workplace. That’s why it’s important to ensure that people can maintain the hearing that they have, not to lose any more, and for those who are younger and maybe haven’t been in the industry for so long, promote to them how important it is to protect their hearing.”

How loud is too loud?

OSHA’s hearing conservation program sets boundaries at an average of 85 decibels for an eight-hour period. For every 3-decibel increase, workers are advised to cut their maximum exposure time in half. For example, 88 decibels is safe for up to four hours, 91 decibels is safe for up to two hours, and so on.

Baseline and annual audiograms may help participants in a hearing conservation program determine whether workers are avoiding hearing loss. If a worker shows a change in hearing test results – described by experts as a “standard threshold shift” – the employer is required to fit or refit the worker for hearing protection, train the worker on proper use, and ensure the worker wears the protection.

Continued next week: Hearing Conservation

SCI OSHA News: Tips for avoiding OSHA citations for lockout/tagout

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What gets employers into LOTO trouble with OSHA? Attorney Nickole Winnett, shareholder in the Washington, D.C., office of Jackson Lewis, points to a number of culprits, including failing to ensure that energy control procedures have been developed, documented, and are in use for each piece of equipment where servicing and maintenance occur. Exceptions are situations in which the following are all in place:

- The equipment has no potential for stored or residual energy or reaccumulation of stored energy after shutdown, which poses a risk for employees.
- The equipment has a single energy source, which can be readily identified and isolated.
- Isolating and locking out the energy source will completely de-energize the equipment.
- The machine or equipment is isolated from the energy source and locked out during service or maintenance.
- A single lockout device will achieve a lockout condition.
- The lockout device is under the exclusive control of the authorized employee.
- The servicing or maintenance does not create hazards for other employees.



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Quick Tips for Healthy Living

Stress Management Tips

Everyone experiences stress, but successfully managing that stress is part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Stress, especially chronic stress, may lead to headaches, muscle or chest pain, fatigue, upset stomach, sleep problems, anxiety, restlessness, anger, depression, overeating, or under eating.

Check out the tips below for healthy ways to unwind when feeling overwhelmed.

1. Exercise at least three days a week. Increasing physical activity is an excellent way to manage stress and improve overall health.
2. Practice deep breathing. This is the single most important component of a stress management program.
3. Avoid excessive use of caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.
4. Spend your free time with people who make you happy.
5. Make time for yourself. Allow yourself at least 20 minutes a day doing something that you enjoy.
6. Learn to let go of things that you cannot change.
7. Change your negative thinking. Once you've caught yourself thinking negatively, take a deep breath and replace the negative thought with more realistic thinking.
8. Schedule mundane tasks during low energy times of the day.
9. Examine your priorities. Eliminate tasks that are unnecessary or not part of your life goals.
10. Laugh!! Laughter is another great stress management technique to include in your overall stress management plan.
11. Choose actions and coping strategies that are helpful and life affirming.
12. Delegate tasks that you can to others.
13. Take a hot bubble bath or get a massage.
14. Schedule important tasks during your most productive time of day.
15. Have books, magazines, or music you enjoy on hand while waiting for appointments.



Winnett explains that in order to apply this exception, the employer has to have had no accidents involving unexpected activation or reenergizing of the equipment during service or maintenance. If the above conditions are not met, written procedures must be developed for *each* piece of equipment.

Another potential red flag for regulators is businesses that operate out of more than one location. "If you have multiple worksites, OSHA looks at the history of the company to determine whether to issue serious, repeat, or willful violations," says Winnett.

If an employer has received a LOTO citation at a plant in one city, but has not made and verified the fixes, OSHA could issue a repeat violation with penalties up to \$70,000 (and higher after August 2016) for the same problem at another location. For that reason, employers should communicate OSHA citations received at one location to other sites so they can review their practices and make any necessary changes.

As well, Winnett urges employers to be mindful of the federal government's practice of issuing contracts to employers with a strong record in safety and other compliance areas. "If you've received a citation, the government is going to weigh that in determining who gets contracts." Employers need to provide equipment- and program-specific training to employees and not rely solely on off-the-shelf LOTO safety videos.

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ilconnections@aol.com
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