

# HEARING CONSERVATION PROGRAM

## **Program Element R2-10-207(11)(c)**

Each agency shall develop, implement, and monitor a Hearing Conservation Program element when applicable.

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Harmful sound, or noise, must be identified and evaluated with sound pressure level (SPL) monitoring devices when it is present in the workplace. Employers must protect employee hearing via engineering controls, administrative controls, or hearing protection devices (HPDs) when the OSHA Action Limit is met or exceeded in the workplace.

<b>Definition:</b>	A hearing conservation program is a written program that is designed to prevent hearing loss in employees that work in environments where noise levels above 85 dBA or a daily noise dose of 50% over an 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA) are present.
<b>Why do I need this program?</b>	This program is needed to ensure employers have assessed noise levels which may result in hearing damage, and to ensure that employees exposed to noise are protected and monitored to prevent hearing loss.
<b>How do I know if this program applies to my agency and my specific job hazards?</b>	Employers must establish and implement a Hearing Conservation Program for those employees who are exposed to a sound level greater than the "Action Level" of 85 dBA TWA and/or 50% of the Daily Noise Dose. Impulsive noise levels shall not exceed 140 dBC. The key elements of an effective Hearing Conservation Program are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) Noise exposure monitoring and analysis</li><li>b) Use of engineering controls</li><li>c) Use of administrative controls</li><li>d) Use and selection of proper hearing protection devices (HPDs)</li><li>e) Initial and annual audiometric testing</li><li>f) Initial and annual employee training</li><li>g) Recordkeeping; and</li><li>h) Annual program evaluation</li></ul>

**What are the minimum required elements and/or best practices for a Hearing Conservation Program**

There are five OSHA required Hearing Conservation Program elements:

1. Noise Monitoring: A Sound Pressure Level (SPL) Meter identifies the noise source and a Dosimeter measures the employees' 8-Hour TWA and %dose exposure. Monitoring must be repeated when a change occurs that could increase noise levels, such as a work process change or the introduction of new equipment.
2. Audiometric Testing: Must be conducted at the Agency's expense. Audiogram testing rooms or booths must meet the requirements of ANSI S3.1 (latest version). The testing must be performed under the responsibility of a physician, a professional audiologist, or an otolaryngologist. This testing must include baseline audiograms (reference test) and annual audiograms thereafter (follow-up testing).
3. Hearing Protective Devices (HPDs): Employers must make hearing protection available to employees that are exposed to the OSHA AL of 85 dBA over an 8-hour TWA. Employees exposed to the OSHA PEL of 90 dBA over an 8-hour TWA must mandatorily wear HPDs. HPDs must be comfortable and carry sufficient attenuation to prevent hearing loss. Each type of hearing protector has a certain attenuation value, which is calculated using the manufacturer's noise reduction rating (NRR).
4. Training and Education: Employers must train employees who are exposed to TWAs of 85 dBA and above at least annually on the effects of noise; the purpose, advantages and disadvantages of various types of hearing protectors; the selection, fit, and care of protectors; and the purpose and procedures of audiometric testing.
5. Recordkeeping: OSHA requires employers to keep noise exposure measurement records for two (2) years, and maintain records of audiometric test results for the duration of the affected employee's employment.

**Are there any mandatory training requirements or best practices that must be developed by the agency?**

**Yes.** Training must be given before an employee is assigned to an area where occupational noise levels are at or above the OSHA Action Level of 85 dBA over an 8-hour TWA or 50% dose. The Hearing Conservation Program training must be repeated annually and shall include:

- The effects of noise on hearing
- The purpose of hearing protectors
- The advantages, disadvantages, and attenuation of various types of hearing protectors
- Instructions on selection, fitting, use and care of hearing protectors
- The purpose of audiometric testing
- An explanation of the test procedures

The training program must be reviewed and updated to be consistent with any changes that have occurred in the workplace affecting noise levels or employee exposure. The training program should be reviewed annually.

**Are there specific requirements for documenting the program, training, etc...?**

**Yes.** Audiometric test records must include the employee's name and job classification, date, examiner's name, date of the last acoustic or exhaustive calibration, measurements of the background sound pressure levels in audiometric test rooms, and the employee's most recent noise exposure measurement.

Pursuant to ARS § 41-151.12, all employee exposure assessment records must be maintained for 30 years following an employee's termination of employment and must be kept separated from the employee personnel file.

All employee-training records must be retained for two (2) years after the training was received. The Arizona Secretary of State retains employee-training records for five (5) years after training is received.

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**Are there any resources available that can assist me in putting together a Hearing Conservation Program**

**Yes.** Risk Management has Industrial Hygienists and Loss Prevention Consultants available to assist in identifying and monitoring for occupational noise. If noise exposure is identified within an agency, State Risk Management can assist in the establishment of a Hearing Conservation Program.

Other resources:

The OSHA Hearing Conservation Standard, 29 CFR 1910.95, visit [www.OSHA.gov](http://www.OSHA.gov)

ACGIH TLV Booklet, Latest Edition

*Noise and Hearing Conservation Manual*, latest Edition edited, AIHA