

## HEARING PROTECTION

Many workers are overexposed to noise, either from their own work or from ambient noise.

In time, overexposure decreases our ability to hear. Older workers might confuse work-related hearing loss with hearing loss due to aging.

It is possible to slow down or stop noise-induced hearing loss by taking precautions.

It's important to know that overexposure to noise doesn't necessarily take a long time. Short periods of very high noise can cause overexposure.

For example, working for only 15 minutes with a gas-powered quick-cut saw will lead to overexposure for that day.

Noise is generally measured in decibels (dB). The scale commonly used to measure noise that may harm human hearing is the A scale. Decibels on the A scale are therefore described as dBA.

You should wear hearing protection if you're exposed to noise levels such as:

- more than 85 dBA for 8 hours,
- more than 88 dBA for 4 hours, or
- more than 91 dBA for 2 hours.

Most power tools and equipment used in construction operate well over these levels.

Since it's difficult to reduce noise levels on site, the next best choice is hearing protection.

The two main types of hearing protection are muffs and plugs. They each have advantages and disadvantages but generally ear muffs provide better protection.

### Muffs

- Useful for intermittent noisy work as they are quick and easy to put on and take off.
- Don't last forever. Their protection and comfort decrease over time. Muff cushions must be replaced when they lose flexibility or are damaged.
- Tension in the headband needs to be just right: too loose – they don't give enough protection; too tight – they're uncomfortable.

## Plugs

- Are light and comfortable for most users. But they have to be put in properly to work right. Your hands have to be clean to insert them.
- Come in single-use or multiple-use types. Multiple-use types should be replaced often when working in contaminated environments.

Plugs and muffs should have a Noise Reduction Rating (NRR) printed on the packaging. This is the reduction the protection will provide **in an ideal situation**. In the real world, the reduction may only be half of the printed NRR.

*[Instructor to:*

- *review any special requirements for hearing protection on the site;*
- *determine what types of protection are being worn; and*
- *identify some tasks that require hearing protection on the project.]*

In New Brunswick, the law on noise and hearing protection can be found in *General Regulation 91-191* under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, sections 29 – 33, 38 and 48.

**You can find more information on WHSCC's programs and services on the internet at <[www.whscc.nb.ca](http://www.whscc.nb.ca)>.**

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