

LISTEN UP!

Hearing Loss is the #1 Work-Related Injury

Approximately **22 million U.S. workers** are exposed to hazardous noise levels at work of whom 18 percent have hearing loss.ⁱ An additional 9 million workers are exposed to ototoxic chemicals that may cause hearing loss. Both of these factors combine to **make occupational hearing loss (OHL) the most common work-related injury in the United States.**ⁱⁱ

Occupations such as construction, mining, manufacturing and law enforcement are commonly recognized as having increased noise exposure and therefore are at risk for OHL. Many people do not realize that workers in other professions, such as teaching and business, also suffer from OHL.



THE IMPORTANCE OF HEARING ON THE JOB

Working in a noisy environment can create physical and psychological stress, reduce productivity and interfere with communication and concentration. While the usual reason to control noise in the workplace is to protect the hearing of the workers, a study conducted by researchers from National Public Health Institute of Quebec in Quebec City, Canada uncovered another major reason – workplace safety. Noisy environments can contribute to workplace accidents and injuries by making it difficult to hear warning signals.

The study, published in the journal *Injury Prevention*, reveals that hearing loss, combined with noise in the workplace, increases the risk of serious work injury. Based on the study, the researchers estimate that the combination of severe hearing loss and working in a noise-exposed environment of 100 dB increased the risk of injury by 3.6 times, compared with workers with neither factor.ⁱⁱⁱ

Workers rely on their hearing not only for their safety and the safety of those around them, but also to participate in meetings, do business over the phone and receive directions. With this vital sense compromised, workers with untreated hearing loss are often less productive than their peers with healthy hearing. Each employee with a hearing loss problem is typically absent for 3-5 work days for medical care.^{iv}

PREVALENCE OF HEARING PROBLEMS

Most people are surprised to learn that **nearly one in five Americans suffer from hearing impairment** severe enough to make communication difficult.^v Noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) is one of the most prevalent occupational conditions and occurs across a wide spectrum of industries. Occupational NIHL is defined as hearing loss that is a function of continuous or intermittent noise exposure and duration, and which usually develops slowly over several years.^{vi}

Thousands of workers every year suffer from preventable hearing loss due to high workplace noise levels. Since 2004, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has reported that **nearly 125,000 workers have suffered significant, permanent hearing loss.** In 2009 alone, BLS reported more than 21,000 hearing loss cases.^{vii} An estimated **\$242 million is spent annually on worker's compensation for hearing loss disability.**^{viii}



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WHAT CAN BE DONE?

There are several ways to control and reduce worker exposure to noise in the workplace.

- **Engineering controls** that reduce sound exposure levels are available and technologically feasible for most noise sources.
- **Administrative controls** are changes in the workplace that reduce or eliminate the worker exposure to noise.
- **Hearing protection devices**, such as earmuffs and plugs, are considered an acceptable but less desirable option to control exposures to noise. When noise cannot be reduced or avoided with engineering or administrative controls, workers should wearing hearing protection.^{ix}

Noise levels above 80 dB can cause hearing damage. U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) requires employers in general industry to maintain a hearing conservation program whenever noise exposure meets or exceeds an eight hour time-weighted average of 85 dB. Programs must include baseline and annual audiograms, employee training and hearing protection.^x

COVERAGE IS KEY

Despite the overall growing number of employees suffering from hearing loss, far too few are seeking the hearing health care they need. **Although nearly two-thirds of workers with hearing loss can be helped, only 20 percent receive care.**^{xi} Many employees are surprised by the high cost of hearing aids. The National Institutes of Health reports that hearing aids cost on average about \$1,500, but can be as high as \$3,000-\$5,000.

EPIC Risk Management (RM), a division of EPIC Hearing Healthcare, provides a comprehensive service program for the treatment of occupationally induced hearing loss. The goal of EPIC RM is to provide immediate coordination of care; cost containment; and cutting-edge technology coupled with superior customer service for employers; nurse case managers, and third-party administrators – making management easier.

The EPIC RM service plan offers extensive provider coverage with access to cost-containment protocols including superior pricing versus the retail provider and in-house peer review services to ensure that employees get the hearing aid that best suits their individual needs – not just the most expensive option.

To find out more about hearing health care benefits, visit www.epichearingrm.com.

STATS & DATA

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, occupational hearing loss is the most commonly recorded occupational illness in manufacturing, accounting for 1 in 9 recordable illnesses.^{xii}

Did you know?

The low premium offered by EPIC RM covers up to 100% of the total cost of hearing loss treatment, including professional services and devices.

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- ⁱ NIOSH. (2014). Occupational Hearing Loss Surveillance. DHHS (NIOSH) Publication, No. 2013-130. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2013-130/pdfs/2013-130_v2.pdf
- ⁱⁱ National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Division of Applied Research and Technology. (2012, September). Noise and Hearing Loss Prevention. *Center for Disease Control and Prevention – Workplace Safety & Health Topics*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/noise/about.html>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Hearing loss and noise in the workplace can be a dangerous cocktail. (2014). *hear-it*. Retrieved from Hear-it.org <http://www.hear-it.org/hearing-loss-and-noise-workplace-can-be-dangerous-cocktail>
- ^{iv} Ear Professionals International Corporation Risk Management. (2014, October). *EPIC Hearing Risk Management*. Retrieved from EPIC RM website <http://epichearingrm.com/>
- ^v *One in five Americans has hearing loss*. Johns Hopkins Medicine press release. Issued November 14, 2011. Retrieved January 2, 2014 from http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/media/releases/one_in_five_americans_has_hearing_loss
- ^{vi} Kirchner, D.B, Evenson, E., Dobie, R.A., Rabinowitz, P, Crawford, J., Kopke, R., Hudson, T.W. (2012). ACOEM Guidance Statement – Occupational Noise-Induced Hearing Loss. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, Volume 54, Number 1. http://www.ocoem.org/uploadedFiles/Public_Affairs/Policies_And_Position_Statements/Occupational%20Noise-Induced%20Hearing%20Loss.pdf
- ^{vii} Occupational Noise Exposure. (n.d.) *Occupational Safety & Health Administration*. Retrieved from United States Department of Labor <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/noisehearingconservation/>
- ^{viii} National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Division of Applied Research and Technology. (2012, September). Noise and Hearing Loss Prevention. *Center for Disease Control and Prevention – Workplace Safety & Health Topics*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/noise/about.html>
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- ^x Section UV: What constitutes an effective hearing conservation program?.(n.d.) *Occupational Safety & Health Administration*. Retrieved from United States Department of Labor <https://www.osha.gov/dts/osta/otm/noise/hcp/index.html>
- ^{xi} Ear Professionals International Corporation Risk Management. (2014, October). *EPIC Hearing Risk Management*. Retrieved from EPIC RM website <http://epichearingrm.com/>
- ^{xii} NIOSH. (2010). Occupationally-Induced Hearing Loss. DHHS (NIOSH) Publication, No. 2010-136. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-136/>