

LISTEN UP!

Law Enforcement Is at Higher Risk for Hearing Loss

Blazing sirens, revving motors and loud gun shots – these sounds are more than the fabric of your basic crime drama. They are the reality on the job for law enforcement personnel across the country and a primary reason for the elevated level of hearing loss among this group.

While most law enforcement agencies require the use of hearing protection on the range, unprotected exposure of officers to sirens and other high-intensity sounds still exists. In addition, many law enforcement personnel spend substantial time in their cars or on motorcycles, where road and engine noise increase their risk of hearing loss.

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Hearing loss is an issue of epidemic proportions across professions. Most people are surprised to learn that **nearly one in five Americans suffer from hearing impairment** severe enough to make communication difficult.ⁱ Contrary to common belief, this problem is not contained to the older population. According to the Better Hearing Institute, the majority (65 percent) of people with hearing loss are younger than age 65 and still in the workforce.ⁱⁱ Younger workers are at risk as well. In fact, 7.4 percent of generation Xers (ages 29-40) already have hearing loss.ⁱⁱⁱ

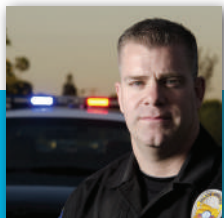
Understanding that people in the law enforcement field are at higher risk for hearing loss, EPIC Hearing Healthcare conducted a comprehensive national survey which uncovered the scope of the problem for this group specifically.^{iv} It found that **52 percent of law enforcement personnel have a diagnosed hearing problem** (versus 12 percent of workers overall). An additional 28 percent of law enforcement personnel suspect they have hearing loss, but have not sought treatment.



THE RAP SHEET

In one French study, police officers were **1.4 times more likely** to have hearing loss than civil servants.^v The difference was even greater for motorcycle police officers.

According to EPIC research, **more than half** of law enforcement personnel believe it is *very likely* that noise exposure in their profession could be damaging their hearing.



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IMPACT OF HEARING LOSS ON THE JOB

Whether face-to-face in the field, or over the telephone or radio, hearing is an important part of law enforcement communication – keeping these professionals informed, safe and connected. Strain from untreated hearing loss can lead to poor communication and become a safety concern. It can also affect health and well-being by causing excessive anxiety and stress, even contributing to depression. According to EPIC's survey, more than three-fourths of law enforcement personnel agree that moderate hearing loss would hurt their productivity on the job.

Despite the overall growing number of people in law enforcement suffering from hearing loss, far too few are seeking the hearing health care they need. **Less than one-fifth of law enforcement personnel have had their hearing checked in the past two years.**

Of those with untreated hearing loss:

- 67% often ask people to repeat what they said
- 61% often misunderstand what is being said
- 61% sometimes pretend to hear when they cannot

LISTEN UP AND MAKE SURE YOU'RE COVERED

Knowing that they are at higher risk for hearing loss, people who work in law enforcement should be educated on the steps they can take now to address and treat hearing loss and safeguard their hearing in the future. They should also consider taking advantage of hearing insurance to cover regular evaluations by an audiologist and to minimize the cost of hearing aids should they be needed. 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. These costs catch many employees off-guard. Consider that 40 percent of law enforcement personnel are under the false impression that hearing aids are covered under most medical plans.

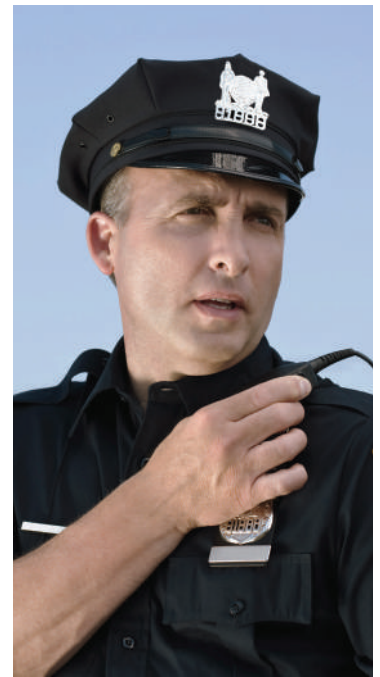
What to do:

- **Learn** about risk factors and treatment options for hearing loss. The *Listen Hear!* public education initiative from EPIC Hearing Healthcare is a great resource to learn about hearing loss risks, prevention and treatment. Free resources can be found at epichearing.com/listenhear.
- **Express** interest in hearing loss treatment and financial support, and take advantage of hearing insurance when it is offered.

Not surprisingly given their higher risk, law enforcement employees are more than twice as interested in hearing insurance as the general population (64% vs. 31%).

When presented with the facts, there is little question about the importance of healthy hearing to promote health and well-being, and most people view it as integral to their job performance as well. By educating themselves and expressing their interest in hearing loss treatment and support, law enforcement personnel can take control of their hearing health and get the care they need.

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



Did you know?

From **\$.35 to \$1.75 per member per month**, hearing insurance is one of the most affordable benefits available for its value.

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ⁱ 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.

ⁱⁱ Kochkin, S. Prevalence of Hearing Loss in the U.S. Better Hearing Institute. Retrieved January 2, 2014 from http://www.betterhearing.org/hearing_loss/prevalence_of_hearing_loss/index.cfm.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kochkin, S. Prevalence of Hearing Loss in the U.S. Better Hearing Institute. Retrieved January 2, 2014 from http://www.betterhearing.org/hearing_loss/prevalence_of_hearing_loss/index.cfm.

^{iv} Listen Hear! 2013 Employee and Employer Perceptions of Hearing Loss and Hearing Loss Benefits survey. Employee survey conducted online by Wakefield Research on behalf of EPIC Hearing Healthcare between November 22 and December 13, 2013, among 1,500 nationally representative full-time employed Americans 18+, including oversamples of sub-audiences of up to 101 Hispanics, 110 African-Americans, 100 Asian-Americans, 169 teachers and 100 law enforcement professionals (all employed full-time). Employer survey conducted online by Source Media on behalf of EPIC Hearing Healthcare in December 2013 among 493 benefits professionals.

^v Lesage, F., Jovenin, N., Deschamps, F., & Vincent, S. (2009). Noise-induced hearing loss in French police officers. *Occupational Medicine*, 59, 7, 483-486. Retrieved on January 16, 2014 from <http://www.wellsphere.com/workplace-health-article/police-officers-and-noise-induced-hearing-loss/830269>.