



MEL SAFETY INSTITUTE SHIFT BRIEFING

Hearing Protection – Ear Muffs or Ear Plugs?

One of the most common hazards we face daily is something we cannot see – noise!

Employers may reduce noise exposure to employees by using *Engineering Controls* such as

- Purchasing equipment with mufflers, or specifying certain types of mufflers
- Enclosing noising machinery in a room, or behind a wall
- Applying noise absorbing wall and floor treatments

Employers can also reduce noise exposure by instituting *Administrative Controls* such as

- Limiting the time an employee spends using a noisy machine, called job rotation.
- Providing training and education on the effects of noise and the benefits of wearing hearing protection

But usually noise can't be eliminated entirely. When you are working in an area with high noise levels, this department will use the third option, *Personal Protective Equipment*. I would like to see every employee who works around a machine or operation that produces uncomfortable level of noise, wear hearing protection.

There are several options when it comes to hearing protection and everyone has their own preference. The most common options being ear muffs and ear plugs. This Department offers both. Each has their advantages and disadvantages.

EAR MUFFS

Advantages & Disadvantages:

- Easier to wear correctly than ear plugs and one size fits all.
- Can be built into hard hats, but if not built in, they can get in the way of hard hats and safety glasses
- Usually have a lower Noise Reduction Rating, but a good Effective Noise Reduction Rating since they are worn correctly more often.
- While they can be nice and warm in the winter, they can be hot and sweaty in the summer, which can lead to cleanliness concerns.
- Ear muffs can be cleaned and pads replaced. But wearing dirty ear muffs can lead to problems

EAR PLUGS

Advantages & Disadvantages:

- Ear plugs are smaller and easier to carry and will not get in the way of other personal protective equipment. In fact, you can wear ear plugs with ear muffs for additional protection!
- Many people find ear plugs less hot and more comfortable than ear muffs.
- Ear plugs are difficult to insert and remove and if not worn correctly, leaving the worker unprotected.
- One challenge to using ear plugs is your hands should be clean when you insert foam models
- Earplugs are disposable, removing the cleaning issue.

Damage from noise is mostly cumulative, so, don't forget to use hearing protection outside of work when exposed to high noise levels from lawn mowers, hunting or other loud activities and hobbies!

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