*This model program is intended for general information purposes only. It should not be construed as legal advice or legal opinion regarding any specific or factual situation. Always follow your organization's policies and procedures as presented by your manager or supervisor.*

**Hearing Protection for Firefighters & EMTs Model Policy**

*Verbiage in red is guidance and should be deleted from the finalized policy*

**Purpose**:

In compliance with N.J.A.C. 12:100-10.13 and the OSHA Hearing Conservation Standard 29 CFR 1910.95, insert name of agency establishes this policy to manage or eliminate hazardous noise exposures associated within the work environment to protect the hearing of its members.

**Scope:**

This policy applies to all members of insert name of agency

**Definitions:**

Action level - An 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels measured on the A-scale, slow response, without regard to any personal protective hearing attenuation.

Attenuation - The estimated sound protection provided by hearing protective devices as worn in actual work environments.

Audiometric testing - Test used to determine a subject's hearing ability using an audiometer.

Audiogram - A table or diagram used to display a representation of a person's hearing loss.

Decibel (dBA) - A unit of measure used to express the intensity of a sound wave.

Time-Weighted Average - Noise exposure measured over a conventional 8-hour workday and a 40-hour workweek, to which it is believed that nearly all workers may be repeatedly exposed, day after day, for a working lifetime without adverse effect.

Standard Threshold Shift (STS) - A change in hearing threshold relative to the baseline audiogram of an average of 10 dB or more at 2000, 3000 and 4000 Hz in either ear.

**Responsibilities**:

The insert name/title of chief officer shall:

* ensure all elements of this written program are in compliance with OSHA standard 29 CFR 1910.95 and shall maintain, update, and annually review this written program.
* evaluate hearing protector attenuation for the specific noise environments in which the protector will be used.
* Coordinate, as required, annual audiometric examinations and audiologist referrals for employees exposed to noise above 85 dBA, and annual retesting of audiometric examinations which indicate an STS in either ear of employees participating in the HCP.
* coordinate annual instruction in the use and care of all hearing protectors provided to firefighters and emergency medical technicians.
* maintain all training and medical records associated with this Hearing Conservation Program

Officers/Crew Chiefs shall:

* maintain an awareness of, and comply with all elements of this written program
* ensure that employees comply with all elements of this written program
* ensure that employees attend training as required by this written program
* ensure that employees wear hearing protection when required under this written program
* ensure hearing protection devices are readily available to employees

Firefighters / EMTs shall:

* attend annual training on the use and care of hearing protection as directed.
* wear and maintain hearing protection in all areas and during all activities requiring its use.
* participate in annual audiometric testing or complete the Audiometric hearing Test Declination Statement each calendar year.
* report to their supervisor any hearing protection or noise related problems or any changing conditions which may impact personnel noise exposure.

**Procedures**

Insert name of agency will conduct, or have conducted, noise surveys of equipment and processes to determine the noise levels suspected to be above 80 dBA. Follow-up measurements are made whenever changes in work practices or methods may change workplace noise exposures. The results of all measurements are recorded, and employees will be notified of noise levels.

Insert name of agency has assembled the following list of work tasks that generate noise levels at or above 80 dBA

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Task / Equipment | Sound Level (dBA) |
| Emergency Equipment |  |
| Testing Pass Alarm |  |
| Next to idling diesel engine, hood/cab down |  |
| Next to idling diesel engine, hood/cab up |  |
| Operating gas-powered generator under load |  |
| Operating gas-powered vent/chain saw; full throttle |  |
| Operating gas-powered circular saw; full throttle |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| Station Equipment |  |
| Circular saw (workshop) |  |
| Lawn mower |  |
| Snow blower |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

*Add additional noise sources to table.*

*Loss control consultants can assist with measuring noise levels*

**Engineering and Administrative Controls**

Engineering and administrative controls will be considered and implemented where feasible on a continuing basis. Engineering controls include, but are not limited to, mufflers, quieter models, and noise shielding. Administrative controls will be implemented within the limitation of work schedules and employee skills and training background. Operational procedures are modified as necessary so that during any one 8-hour period the allowed exposure times will not be exceeded.

Signage will be posted in permanent areas that necessitate hearing protection.

**Hearing Protective Devices**

When engineering and administrative controls cannot reduce exposure level to below 85 dBA, hearing protective devices are required to be worn by firefighters and EMTs. Devices include earmuffs, ear canals, and ear plugs. Personal stereo headsets or "iPods" are not approved for hearing protection and are not permitted to be worn as hearing protective devices when needed.

Hearing protective devices are available at the following locations:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Location** | **Type of Protective Device** | **NRR rating** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

Hearing protective devices will be made readily available to firefighters and EMTs at no charge. Devices will be replaced as often as necessary. Reusable devices, such as earmuffs, can be replaced by turning in defective/damaged earmuffs to insert name/title for a replacement.

Single-use devices should be discarded after use. Preformed earplugs and ear canals can be washed periodically and stored in a clean container/case. Always follow manufacturer’s recommendations for inserting, cleaning, and disposal of ear plugs.

Hands should be washed before handling preformed earplugs and foam inserts to prevent contaminants from being placed in the ear.

**Audiometric Testing**

*Choose one of the following:*

*(best practice)* Audiometric testing will be made available to all firefighters/EMTs within 6 months of initial hire and each year *(or specify other period)* as part of the agency’s physical examination program.

*or*

*(OSHA minimum standard)* Audiometric testing will be made available to all employees who have average noise exposure levels at or above 85 dBA on an 8-hour basis. A baseline audiogram must be provided to an employee within six months of a firefighter’s/EMT’s first exposure at or above 85 dBA. Routine audiometric testing will be repeated at least annually for all individuals exposed to greater than 85 dBA. The audiograms will be compared to the baseline audiogram and other previous routine audiograms to determine whether any significant threshold shift has occurred.

Testing will be overseen by a qualified physician, but may be performed by qualified health professionals or trained technicians. Tests and retests shall be preceded by at least 14 hours of workplace noise exposures less than 80 dBA as measured without hearing protectors.

When a comparison of audiograms reveals a significant threshold shift (STS), a retest will be performed to determine whether the shift is permanent.

When a qualified health professional diagnoses STS, the following actions will be taken:

1. The firefighter/EMT will be notified in writing within 21 days from the time that the determination is made showing STS and referred to further medical evaluation.
2. Firefighters/EMTs not using hearing protectors shall be fitted with hearing protectors, trained in their use and care, and required to use them.
3. Firefighters/EMTs already using hearing protectors shall be fitted and retrained in the use of hearing protectors offering greater attenuation, if necessary.
4. When a health professional determines that the STS is work-related, the illness will be recorded on the OSHA Form 300.

The latest audiogram may be substituted for the original baseline audiogram if the professional supervising the program determines that the firefighter’s/EMT’s STS is persistent. This will ensure that the same shift is not repeatedly identified.

**Training**

Firefighters and EMTs will be required to attend training concerning the proper usage and wearing of hearing protection. The training will be conducted by *insert agency's name* or a designated representative, within a month of hire and annually thereafter.

Training shall consist of the following components:

* + - How noise affects hearing and hearing loss
    - Review of the OSHA hearing protection standard
    - Explanation of audiometric testing
    - Rules and procedures
    - Locations and operations where hearing protection is required
    - How to use and care for hearing protectors.

**Recordkeeping**

Noise exposure measurement records will be maintained for at least two years.

Records of audiometric test results will be maintained for the duration of employment of the affected employees, plus 30 years. Audiometric test records will include:

* The name and job classification of the employee;
* The date;
* The examiner's name and organization
* The date of acoustic or exhaustive calibration and measurements of background sound pressure levels in audiometric test rooms; and
* The employee's most recent noise exposure measurement.