



## HEARING PROTECTION – EAR MUFFS OR EAR PLUGS?

One of the most common hazards public employees 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 is 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 an 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 are ear muffs and ear plugs. This Department offers both. Each has its 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 earplugs with ear muffs for additional protection!
- Many people find earplugs less hot and more comfortable than ear muffs.
- Ear plugs are difficult to insert and remove and, if not worn correctly, leave the worker unprotected.
- One challenge to using earplugs 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 lawnmowers, hunting, or other loud activities and hobbies!