



## HEARING PROTECTION – WHAT IS IN IT FOR ME

More than 34 million Americans have hearing loss. About 60% of them are in the workforce. Unaddressed hearing loss poses significant barriers to employee performance, safety, and earnings. According to the Better Hearing Institute, untreated hearing loss can cost a worker as much as \$30,000 in income and income potential each year.

- Underemployment - Workers with severe hearing loss have unemployment rates double that of their peers
- Lost promotional opportunities
- Miscommunications resulting in workplace difficulties

Over a career, that can be about \$ 1 million in lost income and the resulting loss of retirement income.

50% of people with hearing loss have never had their hearing checked. Only about 15% of those who get a physical received a hearing screening.

Some hearing loss in a defined range is a part of the natural aging process, but severe hearing loss has been linked to dementia.

Your agency's employees may perform many tasks that potentially expose them to high levels of noise. There are two levels of noise exposure to be aware of.

- 85 decibels averaged over an 8-hour work day.

This level requires employers to institute a Hearing Conservation Program. Our department has monitored our workplace and determined we [\[need/do not need\]](#) a Hearing Conservation Program (HCP). [HCP has many training requirements not addressed in this talk.](#)

- 90 decibels – common tasks include leaf vacuuming, using many power and hydraulic tools, using small gas engines such as generators and fans, and using a chainsaw.

This level requires employees to wear hearing protection, with a Noise Reduction Rating sufficient to lower the exposure to below 90 decibels.

Employees are reminded of the following to protect their hearing and the welfare of their families:

- Obey all warning labels, such as those on leaf vacuums, and [list others, especially current or upcoming tasks.](#)
- Not all noisy equipment is labeled. Employees must remain alert to high noise levels.
  - A rule of thumb is, 'if you must yell to a coworker who is about 5 feet away to be heard', the noise is above 90 dbA.

The above are minimum requirements. Employees are encouraged to wear hearing protection when working in even moderately noisy environments.