



SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN



EARBUDS & BLUETOOTH HEADPHONES IN THE WORKPLACE BEST PRACTICES

Earbuds and Bluetooth Headphones are common on many worksites and have been identified as a contributing factor in several fatalities. For example, Oregon OSHA found that a worker lost awareness of his surroundings while listening to music through his earbuds. Unaware that a slow-moving excavator was approaching from behind, he stepped into its path, was struck, and fatally run over.

The risks associated with wearing all types of earbuds and headphones on the job include:

- Difficulty hearing moving equipment, alarms, warnings, horns, shouts, or instructions that could result in being struck by, or caught in, machinery
- The onset or worsening of hearing loss can result from excessive volume. Even music played through earbuds and headphones can contribute to overall noise exposure at work. If the permissible exposure level (PEL) of 90 dBA for noise is exceeded, then the employee's exposure must be reduced to at or below the PEL by reducing or removing noise and using hearing protection.
- Interference with hearing protectors with a labeled Noise Reduction Rating (NRR).
- Difficulty communicating clearly with co-workers.
- Inserted earbuds can become contaminated with workplace chemicals, leading to increased exposures or irritation to the ear canal; likewise, silicone earbuds may be irritants.

Managers should consider the following best practices:

- Do a thorough evaluation of your entire workplace. Identify jobs, work processes, and equipment to determine where the use of earbuds and headphones should be prohibited, along with areas where their use will not create a hazard to the user or others in the area.
- Inform employees about the hazards of using earbuds and headphones on the job. Reinforce messages often. Include both the factual and emotional impact of hearing loss on the professional and personal lives of workers.
- Adopt a policy that prohibits the use of earbuds and headphones in areas where they present a risk to employee health or safety.

MSI offers several resources to implement these best practices at your agency:

- [MSI Model Policy: Earbud & Bluetooth Headphones](#)
- [MSI Video Briefing: Earbuds and Bluetooth Headphones Best Practices](#)
- [MSI Infographic: No Earbud Zones](#)

Source: [Oregon OSHA Hazard Alert: What You Should Know About Using Earbuds on the Job](#)

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