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Weekly Toolbox Talk **Hearing Loss**

More than twenty million Americans suffer some measurable hearing loss and sixteen million workers are exposed to noise on the job that could damage their hearing. OSHA regulations require employers to take measures to reduce exposure to noise levels at or above 90 decibels.

The intensity of a sound is measured in decibels (dB). A whisper measures about 20 dB, our average speaking voice is 60 dB, a shop saw is 100 dB and a jet plane is 140 dB.

Many areas around the job site have high noise levels and everyone needs to take the proper steps in preventing injury to their hearing. First we can try to engineer the noise away by putting up sound barriers or enclosing certain processes.

Second, the company can schedule workers so they spend less time around high noise operations.

Depending on the circumstances, these two options may not be possible to implement but the third thing we can do anywhere, anytime -- wear hearing protection. Different shapes sizes are available -- ear plugs will give you some protection, ear muffs provide you with better protection. To achieve maximum protection you should use both.

Your employer is responsible for requiring the wearing of hearing protection in all operations where there is exposure to high noise levels. As an employee, your responsibility is to obey warning signs that tell you hearing protection is required - use common sense -- if the noise is loud, use protection.

Both loud and impulse noise can slowly destroy your hearing. Wearing protection is your best bet against hearing loss.