

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH**

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OVERVIEW

3.1 What is the purpose of this chapter? This chapter describes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) requirements for protecting you from noise hazards you may encounter while performing your duties.

3.2 What is the Service policy regarding hearing loss prevention? Our policy is to prevent noise-induced hearing loss by:

A. Monitoring your exposure to hazardous noise, and

B. Establishing and implementing procedures and controls that will prevent or minimize noise exposures to below the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s (OSHA) Permissible Exposure Limit (PEL) of 90 dBA (see [section 3.6B](#)).

3.3 What is the scope of this chapter? This chapter applies to personnel whose duties require them to work in or visit operations having hazardous noise levels of 85 dBA or greater for an 8-hour Time Weighted Average (TWA). The policy applies to:

A. All Service employees,

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- B. Volunteers,
- C. Youth Conservation Corps members, and
- D. Student interns.

3.4 What are the authorities for this policy?

- A. Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) Federal Agency Safety Programs and Responsibilities ([Public Law 91-596, Sec. 19](#)).
- B. OSHA Standards, Occupational Noise Exposure ([29 CFR 1910.95 and 1926.52](#)).
- C. Basic Program Elements for Federal Employee Occupational Safety and Health Programs and Related Matters ([29 CFR 1960](#)).
- D. [Executive Order 12196](#), Occupational Safety and Health Programs for Federal Employees.
- E. American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Standards for Noise and Hearing ([ANSI Z12](#)).
- F. [485 DM 17](#), Industrial Hygiene Program and the Occupational Medicine Program Handbook.
- G. [Department of the Interior Occupational Medicine Program Handbook](#), Tabs 8 and 12(E2), Specific Medical Program Requirements.

3.5 Who is responsible for the hearing loss prevention program? See Table 3-1.

Table 3.1: Responsibilities for Noise Control and Prevention of Hearing Loss	
This official...	Is responsible for...
A. Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Ensuring that the Service maintains an effective and comprehensive occupational safety and health program, and (2) Approving our noise control and hearing loss prevention policy.
B. Assistant Director – Business Management and Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Ensuring the Service has a noise control and hearing loss prevention policy, and (2) Ensuring that the Headquarters (HQ) office provides sufficient support and resources to implement the policy.
C. Directorate Members	Providing sufficient support and resources to effectively implement the noise control and hearing loss prevention program in their areas of responsibility.
D. Chief, Division of Safety and Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Revising and updating this chapter, as necessary, (2) Providing up-to-date information on hearing loss prevention issues to the Regional Safety Managers,

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Table 3.1: Responsibilities for Noise Control and Prevention of Hearing Loss	
This official...	Is responsible for...
	<p>(3) Resolving hearing loss prevention issues at a Servicewide level, and</p> <p>(4) Using the Department of the Interior Safety Management Information System (SMIS) to assess the level of hearing loss of Service personnel and identify areas in need of more intensive hearing loss prevention activities.</p>
E. Regional/HQ Safety Managers	<p>(1) Serving as the focal point for implementing the Hearing Loss Prevention Program and providing technical advice to their supervising Directorate member, Project Leaders, supervisors, Collateral Duty Safety Officers, and Safety Committee members;</p> <p>(2) Resolving hearing loss prevention issues at the Regional/HQ level;</p> <p>(3) Providing hearing loss prevention information and updates as appropriate; and</p> <p>(4) Conducting or coordinating noise hazard assessments, as necessary.</p>
F. Project Leaders/ Supervisors	<p>(1) Identifying any equipment and operations that they consider are noise hazards and ensuring that equipment noise levels and personal exposure levels are evaluated (see section 3.9);</p> <p>(2) Ensuring that personnel exposed to or working in hazardous noise environments receive hearing loss prevention training (see section 3.15);</p> <p>(3) Providing access to a medical service provider for those personnel requiring baseline, annual, and exit audiogram testing; and</p> <p>(4) Providing adequate hearing protection to personnel exposed to hazardous noise and requiring its use.</p>
G. Servicing Human Resources Offices	Ensuring that appropriate records management is provided to field stations as required by this chapter.
H. Employees	<p>(1) Attending hearing loss prevention (i.e., hearing conservation) training and complying with the requirements of this chapter if exposed to or working in hazardous noise environments,</p> <p>(2) Wearing hearing protection in hazardous noise areas or when operating equipment that produces hazardous noise levels, and</p> <p>(3) Keeping their hearing protection devices clean.</p>

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3.6 What terms do you need to know to understand this chapter?

A. Audiogram. A chart, graph, or table that an audiometric test produces that shows someone's hearing threshold levels as a function of frequency.

B. dBA. The frequency weighted sound pressure band that best represents the way the human ear perceives sound. It is measured in decibels (dB) with a standard sound level meter at slow response.

C. Hazardous Noise Level for Hearing Protection. A noise level of 85 dBA sound pressure level (also see [section 3.6H](#)).

D. Hazardous Noise Level for Hearing Tests. A noise level of 85 dBA or greater for an 8-hour Time Weighted Average (TWA).

E. Noise Dosimeter. An instrument designed to integrate a function of sound pressure over a period of noise exposure time to calculate a person's overall noise exposure dose.

F. Noise Reduction Rating. A measurement of how much a hearing protector can reduce noise.

G. Sound Level Meter (SLM). An instrument designed to measure acoustic sound pressure and report it as a sound pressure level.

H. Sound Pressure Level. A measurement of the noise level ratio expressed in decibels (dB).

I. Standard Threshold Shift (STS). A change in hearing threshold of an average of 10 dBA or more at the 2,000/3,000/4,000 frequency bands in either ear when compared to the baseline audiogram.

J. Time Weighted Average (TWA). The averaging of different noise exposure levels during an exposure period.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

3.7 What noise levels should Project Leaders/supervisors and employees be aware of?

A. OSHA Permissible Exposure Limit (PEL). OSHA established this exposure limit to protect hearing from noise levels of 90 dBA or greater for an 8-hour TWA.

B. OSHA Hearing Loss Prevention Action Level. OSHA requires enrollment in a hearing loss prevention program (i.e., hearing conservation) for employees exposed to hazardous noise levels at 85 dBA or greater for an 8-hour TWA.

C. Noise Levels at Service Facilities.

(1) If your Service facility or workplace has operations or equipment creating hazardous noise exposure levels, the Project Leader/supervisor must follow the hearing loss prevention program requirements in this chapter.

(2) You can find more information on OSHA's requirements for preventing hearing loss, which are the basis for this chapter, on [OSHA's Noise and Hearing Conservation Web site](#).

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3.8 What job tasks or equipment operation may require implementation of a hearing loss prevention program?

- A.** Exposure to any of the operations or equipment in [Exhibit 1](#) may require the use of hearing protection unless testing, at the operator's ear, indicates noise levels below 85 dBA sound pressure level.
- B.** If operations/equipment generate personal noise exposure levels (determined by a noise dosimeter) exceeding the hazardous noise level for hearing tests, then we require audiometric testing. There is a permissible noise exposure table in [Exhibit 1](#) to help you determine if a hearing loss prevention program is necessary.

3.9 How does a Project Leader/supervisor evaluate operations to determine if a hearing loss prevention program is necessary?

A. Assessment. Your Project Leader/supervisor must identify any equipment or operations that they consider to be noise hazards. They include equipment/operations they consider "noisy" through experience, or where they have to raise their voices to communicate with others.

B. Evaluation. Project Leaders/supervisors must ensure that equipment noise levels (by sound level meter) and personal exposure levels (by noise dosimeter) are taken and documented. They accomplish this by:

- (1) Contacting the Regional/HQ Safety office for assistance, or
- (2) Contracting with a local environmental safety and health company.

C. Evaluation results determine to what extent Project Leaders/supervisors must implement [sections 3.10 through 3.14](#) of this chapter.

D. If the evaluation shows that an employee is exposed to a hazardous noise level, the Project Leader/supervisor must notify the employee in writing and enroll him/her in the hearing loss prevention program.

3.10 When a Project Leader/supervisor determines a work area or the operation of equipment involves hazardous noise levels, how does he/she inform employees and others? The Project Leader/supervisor must ensure that a sign or label with the following language is clearly posted on equipment and at entrances to areas where people may be exposed to hazardous noise levels:

<p>WARNING NOISE AREA HEARING HAZARD USE OF HEARING PROTECTORS REQUIRED</p>
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3.11 How do Project Leaders/supervisors reduce the impact of hazardous noise levels? Project Leaders/supervisors must develop controls for work environments with continuous noise exposures greater than OSHA's Permissible Exposure Limit of 90 dBA for an 8-hour TWA. Consult with your Regional/HQ Safety or Engineering office for assistance.

A. Controls may be any one or a combination of the following:

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(1) Engineering Controls. You can engineer out the noise through measures that eliminate, enclose, or dampen the noise.

(2) Administrative Controls. You can administratively reduce the impact of hazardous noise levels by replacing equipment, rotating personnel, etc.

(3) Personal Protective Equipment. The last method we use to reduce noise exposure, if engineering and administrative controls fail or are not feasible, is to issue hearing protection devices (see [section 3.14](#)).

B. If employees are only intermittently exposed to work environments exceeding 90 dBA continuous noise (see [section 3.7A](#)), then these controls are not always necessary.

3.12 Who performs the medical evaluations for hearing loss prevention programs, and what do the evaluations involve?

A. An audiologist, otolaryngologist, physician, or technician who is certified by the Council of Accreditation in Occupational Hearing Conservation (medical professional) must administer:

(1) Medical evaluations for hearing loss prevention, but

(2) Only after the employee has been absent exposure to hazardous noise for at least 14 hours.

B. The Service will arrange all medical testing for hearing loss prevention at no cost to the employee.

C. There are three times when employees exposed to hazardous noise levels must have their hearing evaluated—as a baseline, annually, and when employment ends:

(1) Baseline audiometric testing. Employees who must work in environments known or suspected of having hazardous noise levels must receive a baseline audiogram within 6 months of employment or relocation (or beginning work in an area with hazardous noise levels).

(2) Annual audiometric testing. Personnel in our hearing loss prevention program must get an annual hearing test. Medical professionals compare the test results against baseline data to detect the presence of a Standard Threshold Shift (STS). Employees receiving audiograms through medical standards programs (i.e., Law Enforcement, Wildland Fire, and Diving programs) must notify the medical professional that the hearing test must meet OSHA requirements for a hearing conservation audiogram. These employees must schedule additional audiograms for years when they do not have regularly scheduled medical exams.

(3) End of employment (exit) audiometric testing.

(a) Permanent employees in the hearing loss prevention program who are leaving the Service must take an audiometric test. The test is optional for seasonal and temporary employees and employees who have been with the Service for less than a year.

(b) You must take the test before your last day on the payroll.

(c) We may use the test to evaluate any post-employment medical problems you claim are a result of an exposure to hazardous noise levels within your occupational setting.

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D. The medical professional:

- (1) Documents the evaluations (see FWS [Form 3-2286](#)) for a sample audiometric report), and
- (2) Provides a record stating the employee's hearing ability to both the employee and the employee's Project Leader/supervisor.

3.13 What happens if a medical professional identifies an STS? If the medical professional detects an STS (see [section 3.6I](#)), then:

A. The medical professional:

- (1) Notifies the employee in writing within 21 days of determining the STS,
- (2) Notifies the employee's Project Leader/supervisor in writing of the audiogram findings, and
- (3) Sends copies of the test results to the employee and the servicing Human Resources office.

B. The employee must meet with his/her Project Leader/supervisor to discuss the issue with their audiogram.

C. The Project Leader/supervisor must:

- (1) Contact the Regional/HQ Safety office to discuss the issue with the employee's audiogram, and
- (2) Provide the following information to a reviewing medical professional:
 - (a) The Service and OSHA hearing loss prevention regulations,
 - (b) The employee's baseline and most recent annual audiogram,
 - (c) Background dBA Sound Pressure Level (SPL) measurements from the audiometer test room, and
 - (d) The audiometer calibration records.

3.14 What are the different types of hearing protectors? There are many variations on two common types of hearing protectors—earmuffs and ear plugs (see [Exhibit 1](#) for a list of equipment and operations that generate noise levels that may require the use of hearing protectors). The Service will provide employees with and tell them how to use hearing protective devices to limit their exposure to hazardous noise levels. The Project Leader/supervisor must provide employees with different types and brands of hearing protectors to choose from so the employee can find one that fits and provides the necessary protection. An employee, with approval of his/her supervisor, may use such devices in other noise environments not meeting the hazardous noise level criteria for hearing protectors.

A. If you work in an environment where noise levels are equal to or greater than 85 dBA SPL, you must use appropriate hearing protectors.

B. People who are visiting or working in close proximity to operations or equipment generating hazardous noise levels must also use hearing protectors.

C. Hearing protectors must reduce noise below the hazardous level. Hearing protector packaging

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describes the noise reduction rating. We encourage you to use hearing protectors that offer the greatest available noise reduction rating and are comfortable for you to wear.

D. Do not use hearing protectors with a noise reduction rating of less than 22 unless operations absolutely require the ability to hear human voices or radio traffic (e.g., Law Enforcement, Fire personnel).

E. Consult your Regional/HQ Safety Manager and the [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health \(NIOSH\) Hearing Protection Device Compendium](#) for guidance on the selection of appropriate hearing protectors.

TRAINING & ADMINISTRATION

3.15 What are the training requirements for employees in the hearing loss prevention program?

A. We must provide all employees enrolled in the hearing loss prevention program with information and training that ensures they are aware of the health effects caused by hazardous noise levels and how to protect themselves from exposure.

B. Employees must take the training when initially assigned to the work area or operation and annually thereafter.

C. The training must include information on:

- (1)** How noise affects hearing;
- (2)** Auditory system makeup;
- (3)** Signs and symptoms associated with hearing loss;
- (4)** OSHA's Permissible Exposure Limit and Hearing Loss Prevention Action Level;
- (5)** When and where hearing protectors are required;
- (6)** Hearing protector selection, use, limitations, and care; and
- (7)** Audiometric testing purposes and procedures.

3.16 What are the recordkeeping requirements for the hearing loss prevention program?

A. Project Leaders/supervisors must:

- (1)** Retain noise exposure data and equipment calibration documentation for a minimum of 2 years. This complies with [29 CFR 1910.95](#), OSHA's Occupational Noise Exposure standard;
- (2)** Retain copies of the audiogram-related evaluations (e.g., physician opinions) for, at a minimum, the length of employment;
- (3)** Retain a written record of all hearing loss prevention training employee(s) successfully complete (see [section 3.15](#)); and

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(4) Enter information showing when employees, volunteers, and youth/collegiate program participants complete Hearing Loss Prevention training (i.e., hearing conservation) into the Department's Learning Management System (i.e., DOI Learn). If the system will not allow them to enter the training, the Project Leader/supervisor must maintain and track safety and health training by documentable and producible means

B. The servicing Human Resources office must retain all audiograms, related evaluations (e.g., physician opinions), audiometric reports ([FWS Form 3-2286](#)), and audiometric equipment calibration requirements for, at a minimum, the length of employment of a person in the hearing loss prevention program.

C. We must collect and maintain records containing personal information (e.g., medical evaluations and physician statements, etc.) in compliance with [5 U.S.C. 552a](#) (The Privacy Act of 1974). Employees tasked with storing and maintaining such records must read and be familiar with OPM/GOVT-10. These records:

(1) Are sensitive and protected by the Privacy Act (see [204 FW 1](#) for more information on the Privacy Act).

(2) Must only be available to staff on a need-to-know basis. All records required by this section must be provided upon request to employees, former employees, representatives designated by the individual employee, and the Assistant Secretary ([29 CFR 1910.95](#)).

(3) If electronic, must be password protected and only used in accordance with the routine uses identified in "OPM/GOVT-10, Employee Medical File System Records."

(4) If hard copy, protected in a locked file and locked room that is available only to staff who have a need to know this information in accordance with OPM/GOVT-10.

/sgd/ Stephen Guertin
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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