

Noise in the Workplace

Noise is one of the most common workplace hazards. Workers in many industries and occupations in Manitoba are exposed to noise levels that are so high that their hearing can be damaged.

What are the health effects of noise?

Noise can damage hearing and cause stress. The amount of hearing you lose depends on the loudness of the sound and the length of time you are exposed to it. You may not feel any pain or discomfort. Hearing loss occurs gradually over time and often goes unnoticed.

At this stage, hearing loss may become permanent and irreversible. Once damaged, your hearing cannot be restored by any medical treatments, surgery, or hearing aids. Early hearing loss can only be detected by a hearing test conducted by an audiologist or an ear, nose and throat specialist.

Excessive noise is tiring, irritating and annoying. High noise levels can make it difficult for you to hear important messages in some jobs. Safety, concentration and productivity can be affected. People with hearing loss have

trouble understanding a conversation and it becomes harder to communicate or socialize. Family and social relationships can be strained.

Overexposure to loud noise can also lead to tinnitus, a ringing or buzzing in the ears. This condition can be temporary or last for several years.

What should your employer do?

Employers in Manitoba are legally responsible for minimizing noise in their workplace. Their responsibilities are outlined in the Workplace Safety and Health Regulation on Hearing Conservation and Noise Control (Part 12). Employers should

- work closely with the workplace health and safety committee to implement a noise control and hearing conservation program

How can I tell if my workplace is too loud?

If you answer yes to any of the following questions, your workplace may have a noise problem.

- Do you have to raise your voice or shout directly into someone's ear in order to be heard?
- Do you hear a "ringing in your ears" at the end of a work day?
- Do you hear better at the beginning of your shift than at the end?



- reduce or eliminate noise, for example by replacing noisy equipment with quieter equipment
- isolate noisy equipment in an enclosed room or cover the walls, ceiling or noisy machine with materials that absorb the sound
- measure noise levels and evaluate sources of noise
- ensure training is provided to workers on the harmful effects of noise and how to protect themselves
- provide hearing tests conducted by qualified personnel
- provide hearing protection such as ear plugs or ear muffs
- train workers on how to properly select, use and maintain hearing protection
- ensure noisy areas have signs to clearly show hearing protection is required

For more information on the legal responsibilities of employers, contact the Workplace Safety and Health Branch.

What can you do?

- ask your workplace health and safety committee or worker representative to identify the risks for noise exposure in your workplace
- wear and properly maintain required hearing protection
- wear hearing protection at home while working around the house (using power tools or lawn mower) and driving recreational vehicles (snowmobiles)
- if you think your hearing has been affected at work, ask your family doctor for a hearing test or see an ear specialist. If the doctor determines that you have noise-induced hearing loss, ask your doctor to file a claim to the Workers Compensation Board.

For more information contact

MFL Occupational Health Centre, Inc.
102- 275 Broadway
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 4M6
Phone: (204) 949-0811
Toll Free: 1-888-843-1229 (Manitoba only)
Email: mflohc@mflohc.mb.ca
Website: www.mflohc.mb.ca

or

Workplace Safety and Health Branch
200 - 401 York Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0P8
Phone: (204) 945-3446
Website: www.gov.mb.ca/labour/safety

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