

Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

#146– 4/25/13

A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

TOPIC: SAFETY – NOISE CONTROL

If an employer has employees who are exposed to an 8-hour time weighted average of 85 dB, or greater, Cal/OSHA requires that they have a hearing conservation program. Like other requirements this should be considered as a supplement to the entity's IIPP. The hearing conservation program would require:

- Noise to be monitored, and all exposed employees tested with expert evaluation of test results;
- Exposed employees to wear hearing protection;
- Training for exposed employees;
- Posting of Cal/OSHA regulations; and
- Recordkeeping of the measurements, testing, and process. These records must be available to the exposed workers and retained for at least two years.

The program requirement is triggered by an 8-hour time weighted average of 85dB, and as a practical matter very few of our members' employees face that exposure. They commonly experience occasional noises that exceed the threshold (gunshots at 140, jackhammer at 130, and machinery in excess of 100dB), but not on a weighted average over an 8-hour work day.

When the employer identifies the sources of "action level" (85dB) noise they have a number of options available to mitigate the exposure. Re-engineering the environment or administratively realigning the work-force to shorten the exposure can be expensive options. The more common approach is to require the use of personal protective equipment like earplugs. What is not necessary – and costs members significant money – is to send employees for annual hearing tests when they are not exposed to the 85dB threshold.

When a hearing test reveals a shift in the employee's baseline hearing, a retest is done within 30 days by a medical doctor to confirm the shift. Usually, after the ears are cleaned, and the employee is insulated from excessive noise for 24 hours, the test indicates that the hearing has returned to normal. When the retest confirms the threshold shift a 5020 (employer's first report of industrial injury) should be submitted to YCPARMIA, and a DWC 1 (workers' comp claim form) should be given to the employee. Workers' comp then sends the employee to a physician specializing in Otolaryngology and/or Audiology.

Hearing loss is always preventable, but never curable. When the hearing gets bad enough, hearing aids are prescribed. The cost of these, paid by WC, is about \$5,000 every five years for the rest of the employee's life. At the same time, hearing aids have advanced to the point that permanent disability is seldom awarded to the employee.

Note: YCPARMIA offers training, coordinates hearing tests, and can conduct noise surveys upon request.

Next Topic: Safety – Reporting Injuries to Cal/OSHA