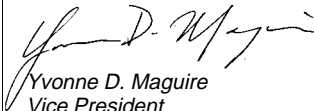


# Management Instruction

## Hearing Conservation Programs

This instruction provides policy for implementing and maintaining a facility-level hearing conservation program, as required by Occupational Safety and Health Administration standard, 29 Code of Federal Regulations 1910.95, "Occupational Noise Exposure." Further details on establishing and maintaining a hearing conservation program (including a written program template) are available from the Safety Toolkit or on the Safety and Health Intranet home page on the Postal Service Intranet under Program Guides.

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Unit	Safety Performance Management
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## Policy

### Sound Level Surveys

Managers must ensure that initial sound-level surveys are conducted in all plants and other facilities where employees may be exposed to sound levels greater than 85 decibels using the A scale (dB(A)) time-weighted average (TWA). Additionally, periodic (at least annual) follow-up sound-level surveys must be conducted in those operations where employees have been documented to be exposed above 85 dB(A), or may be exposed to persistent sound greater than 85 dB(A). These surveys must document employee exposures in order to comply with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards.

### Hearing Conservation

If employees are exposed to sound levels at or above 85 dB(A) TWA — or 50 percent of the allowable dose — the OSHA standard requires a hearing conservation program that includes periodic sound-level surveys, audiometric testing and evaluation, availability of hearing protectors, training, and record-keeping (see Hearing Conservation Program Elements).

### Control of Noise Exposure

If employees are exposed to sound levels at or above 90 dB(A) TWA, the OSHA noise standard requires management to use feasible administrative or engineering controls to reduce exposure:

1. Administrative controls include modifying work schedules to reduce time of exposure.

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## DEFINITIONS

(taken from 29 CFR 1910.95)

**audiogram** — A chart, graph, or table resulting from an audiometric test showing an individual's hearing threshold level as a function of frequency.

**audiometer** — An instrument used to measure the threshold of hearing at various frequencies.

**decibel (dB)** — Unit measurement of sound level.

**decibel (A) (dB(A))** — Measurement of sound level in decibels using the A scale on a sound-level meter. The A scale is used to approximate human response to sound at various frequencies.

**hearing protectors** — Ear plugs, muffs, or other devices that are designed specifically to protect the ears from the effects of excess noise and that have an assigned noise reduction rating and meet other nationally recognized standards.

**time-weighted average (TWA) sound level** — That sound level that if constant over an 8-hour exposure would result in the same noise dose as measured.

2. Engineering controls include ensuring proper maintenance to reduce noise, e.g., enclosing conveyor systems, isolating equipment, modifying equipment to reduce noise, and using sound-absorbent materials.

When sound cannot be feasibly controlled through engineering or administrative controls (and that has been documented) and the noise level meets or exceeds 90 dB(A), employees must be provided, and must wear, hearing protectors.

**Note:** Although OSHA requires these controls at or above 90 dB(A) TWA, management must attempt to utilize administrative and engineering controls to reduce exposures to below 85 dB(A) to protect employees and avoid expenditure on hearing conservation programs.

## Hearing Conservation Program Elements

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For additional guidance, consult the Safety Toolkit.

### Determining Noise Exposure Levels

Trained safety and health specialists (e.g., postal safety specialists, contract industrial hygienists), must conduct noise testing using calibrated equipment. Sampling strategies must be designed to identify exposed employees and enable proper selection of hearing protectors, if necessary (see the OSHA standard, section (d) and appendices A and G). Affected employees or their representatives must be afforded the opportunity to observe measurements in accordance with applicable labor agreements.

### Audiometric Testing

Safety personnel must notify the district and plant managers and servicing medical personnel of the names of employees exposed at or above the action level and of the pertinent sound-level readings.

District and plant managers must notify exposed employees. The servicing medical personnel must establish an audiometric testing program for these employees (see the OSHA standard, sections (c) through (p)). The medical personnel must also arrange for medical follow-up procedures, as necessary, including repeat audiograms, refit of hearing protectors, and clinical referrals. Medical personnel must inform the area Human Resources safety analyst and the district and plant managers of confirmed hearing loss that is occupationally related.

## Hearing Protectors

Hearing protectors must be made available to employees when noise levels exceed 85 dB(A). They are required when noise levels exceed 90 dB(A) and when certain other circumstances exist (see the OSHA standard, section (i)). Employees may be provided and allowed to wear hearing protectors to reduce noise exposure at any sound levels.

Servicing medical personnel are responsible for selection and fitting of hearing protectors. Safety personnel are to provide noise data to assist in selection. A variety of protectors must be made available by management.

## Employee Training

Servicing medical personnel must provide annual training to exposed employees that includes explanation of audiometric testing, the effects of noise on hearing, the purpose of and the nature of hearing protectors, and the proper fitting and use of hearing protectors. A copy of the standard must also be posted where a program is in effect and must be available to exposed employees on request.

## Record Keeping

Safety personnel must maintain noise measurement records for 2 years. At the end of each calendar year, these records must be forwarded to the nearest Federal Records Center following instructions in the Records and Information Management System located at [www.rims.usps.gov](http://www.rims.usps.gov).

Servicing medical personnel must maintain training records, by employee and date, for the duration of each employee's employment. Procedures are found in Handbook EL-806, *Health and Medical Service*, 214.1, Administrative Medical Records. Audiometric test data, individual exposure records, and other medical and equipment calibration information related to the employee's audiometric tests are filed in the employee medical folder maintained by the nurse administrator at the district office.

## Responsibilities

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### Headquarters

Safety Performance Management, Employee Resource Management, develops policies and interprets standards and other criteria relating to noise exposure and control and compliance with OSHA regulations.

Facilities establishes design and construction criteria to ensure that new postal facilities (including leased buildings) are designed to limit ambient noise to the lowest feasible level, but not to exceed 85 dB(A) TWA for

exposed postal employees. Facilities coordinates design and construction with Safety Performance Management, Engineering, Purchasing, and other organizational units as necessary to ensure that noise is not a hazard or detriment to employee comfort and productivity. Facility field personnel, e.g., Major Facilities Offices and/or Facility Service Offices personnel, are responsible for ensuring that new facilities meet this goal through inspections and certifications of sound levels.

Engineering is responsible for designing automation and fixed mechanization equipment that limit noise emissions to the lowest feasible level, but not to exceed levels that expose employees to 85 dB(A) TWA.

## **Area Offices**

Area Human Resources monitors hearing conservation programs within the area. Safety personnel in Human Resources provide technical assistance.

## **District and Plant Managers**

District and plant managers are responsible for establishing and maintaining a hearing conservation program if one is required. A written plan is to be implemented when management identifies noise-hazardous areas or equipment (85 dB(A) TWA or above) and noise cannot be reduced through engineering controls.

## **Safety and Medical Personnel**

Safety specialists are responsible for identifying hazardous noise levels, periodically monitoring sound levels, and preparing (in coordination with servicing medical personnel) an installation hearing conservation program when necessary. Audiometric testing and follow-up, medical referral, selection and fitting of hearing protectors, and training must be conducted by qualified medical or certified personnel (see the OSHA standard, section (g)(3)), as arranged by area medical officers and servicing medical personnel.

## **Employees**

Employees are responsible for wearing hearing protection when required and attending training and audiometric evaluations when scheduled.