Hearing Loss - Can You Hear Me?



Many staff and students are exposed to high noise levels in schools and TAFE Colleges, especially in the technical subjects such as metalwork, woodwork and specialist music programs. Other staff, such as gardeners and cleaners, are also exposed to high noise levels when operating equipment.

All staff that work in prescribed roles that are exposed to very noisy environments such as:

- Design & Technology Teachers
- Farm Demonstrators and Supervisors
- Physical Education Teachers who use starter guns
- Secondary Music Teachers
- Gardeners
- Trade Lecturers – TAFE

are required to have a baseline hearing test on commencing their employment and within six months of leaving their employment. This is paid for by the Department or your College.

It has come to our attention that some employees have not been made aware of this.

It is important that if you work in a prescribed workplace and you have not had this baseline test, that you do this as soon as practicable.

If you believe you are suffering from hearing loss, you may request a hearing test.

Details of how to arrange this can be found on the Department intranet in the Employer Support Bureau section under the topic “noise” or ask your safety officer or human resources officer if you are working in TAFE.

If on testing you are found to have experienced a hearing loss of 10% or more due to your work, you are entitled to compensation. If you are an SSTUWA member, please contact us for further advice.

Like all hazards at work, where possible noise must be eliminated or reduced at source. The last line of defence is hearing protection or it may be used in combination with other control measures to maximise noise reduction. Many employees are resistant to wearing hearing protection, particularly in the classroom, but the technology is so advanced now that you can wear it and still hear conversation.

If you have concerns about noise levels or the availability of suitable hearing protection at work, raise this with your principal or line manager or occupational safety and health representative.

How Can Noise Affect Your Life?

Hearing loss, caused by noise, is insidious and permanent. It can cause isolation at home and socially, and decrease efficiency at work.

High pitched sounds, such as consonants and women's and children's voices, are the most affected by noise-induced hearing loss. Thus, while some sounds are still loud, others are filtered out and speech can't be understood. With more than one person speaking or a background noise, the problem is worse.

Unfortunately, lost hearing is gone forever. Hearing aids offer only limited help in decoding the distorted message.

Ringing or other noises in the ears or head, known technically as tinnitus, can also be caused by excessive noise. It too can become permanent in some people and when severe may disrupt sleep, reduce concentration, make you extremely irritable and lead to depression.

Are You At Risk?

If the noise around you makes it necessary for you to raise your voice to make yourself heard to somebody one metre away, your hearing is probably at risk.

Remember, although it may seem that your ears become "used to" noise, this is in fact due to temporary hearing loss.

Repeated exposure to excessive noise will eventually lead to permanent damage.

Noise does not have to be painful to be doing damage.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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