

Noise is a common occupational health hazard found in many workplaces in Newfoundland and Labrador. Due to the nature of the work tasks in the automotive industry, workplaces such as autobody repair shops, garages and service stations often produce noise levels high enough to cause negative health effects in workers. Therefore, controls must be put in place to ensure the health of workers in this industry.

Health Effects

Hearing loss is the most common effect of exposure to excessive noise levels. Such hearing loss is both permanent and irreversible and will continue to worsen if the worker remains exposed. Other non-auditory health effects workers may experience includes potential stresses on the cardiovascular systems and safety concerns. For example, workers with hearing loss may be at an increased risk for safety related incidents since they may not be able to hear warning alarms or may not be able to communicate effectively with other workers.

Legislative Requirements (Section 68)

- When noise hazards are suspected, the first course of action is to measure the noise levels to identify the risk to worker's health.
- Where levels exceed the criteria for permissible noise exposures, controls must be implemented to decrease the noise to acceptable levels.
- Where it is not practicable (e.g. when using air tools) other control measures such as personal protective equipment or hearing protection must be used in accordance with CSA Z94.2 "Hearing Protection Devices Performances, Selection, Care and Use".
- Where noise levels cannot be decreased and continue to exceed the permissible levels, a hearing conservation program which includes annual audiograms for over-exposed workers must be developed and implemented.



Recommendations

- Develop and implement a written, site-specific hearing conservation program in accordance with CSA Z107.56 “Procedures for the Measurement of Occupational Noise Exposure”.
- When preparing to measure the noise levels at the workplace consider both instantaneous noise mapping as well as full-shift noise dosimetry sampling.
- Before implementing the use of hearing protection consider other controls such as:
 - installing barriers or isolating machinery;
 - installing sound absorption devices and/or using sound dampening materials;
 - purchasing tools and machinery that generate lower noise levels; and
 - administrative controls such as shift scheduling should also be considered.
- In places where it is not possible to reduce the noise levels (around the use of some air powered tools) workers overexposed to noise must wear hearing
- When personal protective equipment is used by workers, hearing tests must be conducted on an annual basis or as recommended by an audiologist or occupational physician.
- Ensure workers receive education and training regarding the hazards of noise exposure and regarding the proper use of controls to protect their health.
- Post adequate warning signs at entrances to areas where noise levels exceed permissible levels to indicate the hearing protection that is required.