UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

Management Instruction

Date	2/21/94
Effective	Immediately
Number	EL-810-94-2
Obsoletes	EL-810-88-4
OCC	ER250

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Hearing Conservation Programs

This instruction revises procedures 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."

Contents

POLICY

Sound Level Surveys

Managers must ensure that periodic (at least annual) sound level surveys are conducted in areas where employees might be exposed to excessive levels of noise, i.e., levels greater than 85 dB(A).

Hearing Conservation

If employees are exposed to sound levels at or above 85 dB(A) time-weighted average (TWA)–or 50 percent of the allowable dose–the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standard requires a hearing conservation program that includes 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 work schedule modification to reduce time of exposure.
2. Engineering controls include ensuring proper maintenance to reduce noise, e.g., conveyor systems, isolation of equipment, modification of equipment to reduce noise, and use of sound-absorbent materials.

When sound cannot be feasibly controlled through engineering 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.

DEFINITIONS

(taken from 29 CFR 1910.95)

Audiometer — an instrument used to measure the threshold of hearing at various frequencies.

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

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.

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.

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.

HEARING CONSERVATION PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Determining Noise Exposure Levels

Trained safety and health specialists (e.g., safety and human resources specialists, both Customer Service (CS) and Processing and Distribution (P&D), 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 CS district and P&D 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.

CS district and P&D 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-p). The medical personnel must also arrange for medical follow-up procedures, as necessary, to include repeat audiograms, refit of hearing protectors, and clinical referrals. Medical personnel must inform the human resources analyst with the safety assignment and the CS district and P&D 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 allowed to wear hearing protectors to reduce noise exposure at any 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 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 employees on request.

Record Keeping

Safety personnel in Human Resources offices 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 ASM 351.5. The NARA Job No. will be available in the *Postal Bulletin* subsequent to publication of this instruction.

Servicing medical personnel must maintain training records, by employee and date, for the duration of employment. Procedures are found in 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 Customer Service district.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Headquarters

Safety and Health, Employee Relations, develops policies and interprets standards and other criteria relating to noise exposure and control.

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 and Health, 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.

Area Offices

CS and P&D area offices monitor hearing conservation programs within the area. Safety personnel in Human Resources provide technical assistance.

CS District and P&D Plant Managers

CS district and P&D 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 personnel (CS and P&D) are responsible for identifying hazardous noise levels, periodically monitoring sound levels, and preparing an installation hearing conservation program if one is required. 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.