

Hearing Conservation Program

Purpose

The purpose of the Hearing Conservation Program is to inform and educate employees of _____ County (hereby referred to as “the county”) regarding environmental noise exposure that employees of the county may encounter during the course of their duties, as well as to establish a program to protect the hearing of county employees. The county desires to establish a workplace free of hazards, and is committed to the safety and security of its employees.

Additionally, this program will establish the person or people responsible for environmental noise testing and monitoring, employee audiometric testing, recordkeeping, training, and discipline.

This program is intended to comply with the Occupational Safety and Health Act standard 29 CFR 1910.95.

Scope

This Hearing Conservation Program applies to all departments within the county, all full-time and part-time employees, and volunteers.

Distribution and Review

The Hearing Conservation Program shall be included with the county’s employee handbook, and shall be reviewed with all new full-time and part-time employees prior to their potential exposure to hazardous noise levels. Volunteers not receiving an employee handbook shall be given a copy of this Hearing Conservation Program, and it shall be reviewed with them prior to their potential exposure to hazardous noise levels.

It shall be the responsibility of the employee’s department head to ensure that the employee has received this document, and has reviewed it with the employee. The employee or volunteer shall sign and date this document, the department head shall place the original in the employee’s file and a copy shall be distributed to the employee or volunteer.

Primary Recordkeeper

The Board of County Commissioners have named the Emergency Manager for the county to be the primary recordkeeper for the Hearing Conservation Program. The Emergency Manager will be responsible for maintaining all records regarding environmental noise monitoring, employee audiometric testing, and training. The Emergency Manager’s contact information is:

Name

Office Address

City, State Zip

Office Phone

Cellular Phone

Email Address

Hazard Identification

It shall be the responsibility of the Emergency Manager to conduct a Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) to assess all noise related risks for all jobs within the county, and as new work tasks are created. It shall be the responsibility of department heads and first-line supervisors to request noise monitoring from the Emergency Manager when new work tasks are created.

The Emergency Manager shall be responsible for purchasing, calibrating, and maintaining noise monitoring equipment.

When the JHA reveals a noise level at or above 85dba on an 8-hour time-weighted scale (reference 29CFR1910.95(a)), the task or environment becomes **actionable** (see below).

Actionable Noise Level Procedure

The Emergency Manager and department head shall first attempt to reduce the noise level below 85dba on an 8-hour time-weighted scale by implementing available administrative and engineering controls. If this cannot reduce the noise level sufficiently, all employees exposed to the task or environment shall be required to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

A variety of acceptable PPE shall be selected by the Emergency Manager and department head. The selected PPE shall have a noise reduction rating sufficient to reduce the noise exposure below the actionable level. Employees will be allowed to select the PPE for their use from those deemed as acceptable.

Note: The procedures outlined below apply regardless of the implementation of PPE that is designed to reduce the noise exposure below the actionable level.

The Emergency Manager shall notify each employee exposed at or above an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels of the results of the monitoring.

The Emergency Manager shall provide affected employees with an opportunity to observe any noise measurements conducted pursuant to this section.

The county shall establish and maintain an audiometric testing program by making audiometric testing available to all employees whose exposures equal or exceed an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels.

Audiometric Testing Program

This program shall be provided at no cost to employees, and will apply to all employees that are required to wear PPE for noise level exposure as determined by the Emergency Manager.

Audiometric tests shall be performed by a licensed or certified audiologist through the County Health Department.

All audiograms obtained pursuant to this section shall meet the requirements of 29CFR1910.95 Appendix C.

Within 6 months of an employee's first exposure at or above the actionable level, the county shall establish a valid baseline audiogram against which subsequent audiograms can be compared.

Testing to establish a baseline audiogram shall be preceded by at least 14 hours without exposure to workplace noise. Hearing protectors may be used as a substitute for the requirement that baseline audiograms be preceded by 14 hours without exposure to workplace noise. The county shall notify employees of the need to avoid high levels of non-occupational noise exposure during the 14-hour period immediately preceding the audiometric examination.

At least annually after obtaining the baseline audiogram, the county shall obtain a new audiogram for each employee exposed at or above an 8-hour time-weighted average of 85 decibels.

The County Health Department shall evaluate each employee's annual audiogram and shall be compared to that employee's baseline audiogram to determine if the audiogram is valid and if a standard threshold shift has occurred. A standard threshold shift is a change in hearing threshold relative to the baseline audiogram of an average of 10 dB or more at 2000, 3000, and 4000 Hz in either ear.

If a comparison of the annual audiogram to the baseline audiogram indicates a standard threshold shift has occurred, the employee shall be informed of this fact in writing, within 21 days of the determination. The county shall notify the Workers' Compensation insurance provider and submit a claim for the employee injury, and follow all procedures outlined in the Workers' Compensation Program.

Unless the Workers' Compensation physician determines that the standard threshold shift is not work related or aggravated by occupational noise exposure, the county shall ensure that the following steps are taken when a standard threshold shift occurs:

- Employees shall be refitted and retrained in the use of hearing protectors and provided with hearing protectors offering greater attenuation if necessary.
- The employee shall be referred for a clinical audiological evaluation or an ontological examination, as appropriate, if additional testing is necessary or if the employer suspects that a medical pathology of the ear is caused or aggravated by the wearing of hearing protectors.
- The employee is informed of the need for an ontological examination if a medical pathology of the ear that is unrelated to the use of hearing protectors is suspected.

If subsequent audiometric testing of an employee whose exposure to noise is less than an 8-hour TWA of 85 decibels indicates that a standard threshold shift is not persistent, the employer:

- Shall inform the employee of the new audiometric interpretation; and
- May discontinue the required use of hearing protectors for that employee.

Training

It shall be the responsibility of the Emergency Manager to provide all training regarding this Hearing Conservation Program.

Training shall be provided to all full-time employees, part-time employees, and volunteers.

Training shall be provided to new employees and volunteers prior to their potential exposure to hazardous noise levels, and at least annually to all employees and volunteers.

Training shall cover, at a minimum, the following topics:

- A review of this Hearing Conservation Program.
- A review of 29 CFR 1910.95.
- Methods of detecting hazardous noise levels.
- Health hazards and signs or symptoms of hearing loss.
- Proper work practices for working in hazardous noise levels.
- PPE changes, selection, donning/removal, maintenance, and replacement.
- The purpose of audiometric testing, and an explanation of the test procedures.

All employees attending this training shall be required to sign an attendance sheet. The attendance sheet shall be maintained with other Hearing Conservation Program records by the Emergency Manager.

Discipline

Violations of this policy shall be dealt with according to the county's progressive discipline policy. It shall be the responsibility of the employee's department head to enforce employee compliance to this policy and to apply these disciplinary procedures when necessary.

Record Retention

The Emergency Manager shall retain all training documentation relating to this program, audiometric testing of employees, environmental noise monitoring records, and all annual review documentation of this program, for the period of ten years.

Department heads shall retain the employee signature page of this document in the employee's file for a period of ten years.

Document Review

This Hearing Conservation Program shall be reviewed at least annually by the Emergency Manager and the Board of County Commissioners. If changes are made to this program, it will be re-distributed to all employees and volunteers by their department head and reviewed with the employee or volunteer. The employee or volunteer shall sign and date this document, the original shall be placed in the employee's file and a copy distributed to the employee or volunteer.

Employee Signature

Date