

# Everyone Goes Home “SAFE”!

## **Hearing Loss 2012**

Our hearing conservation program is designed to provide protection against damage from noise by measuring noise levels, requiring hearing test and requiring hearing protection. All company employees included in the hearing conservation plan have an initial or *baseline*, then annual test are done to see if there is any change so actions can be taken if needed. In order for a hearing conservation program to work employees need to be active participants by wearing the appropriate hearing protection and to do their part maintaining equipment to reduce noise levels.

As you reach the end of the year annual audiograms should take place in a timely manner in following your company’s protocol.

### **Noise Exposure**

Noise is all around us at both at work and at play, if above certain levels it can cause damage that may affect your ability to hear some kinds or levels of sounds. Hearing loss caused by noise is a serious risk and a permanent one. Both the level of noise and the length of time you listen to the noise can put you at risk for noise-induced hearing loss.

Noise levels are measured in decibels, or dB for short. The higher the decibel level, the louder the noise. Sounds that are louder than 85 dB can cause permanent hearing loss. The hearing system can be injured not only by a loud blast or explosion but also by prolonged exposure to high noise levels.



### **Hearing Protection**

Hearing protectors **MUST** reduce the noise coming into the ears to at least 90dBA and employees and contractors are required to use hearing protection in all operating units, all posted high noise areas and when working in the vicinity of power tools or other high noise equipment.

**Ear plugs** are a popular choice because they can expand to fit the shape of each user’s ear canal. To be effective, the foam plug is fitted by rolling it between your fingers as small as you can to form a thin cylinder & inserting the tapered end into the ear canal. The plug should then be held in place for a minute to allow it to expand.

**Muffs** have the advantage of not having to be inserted and fitted in the ear canal, but are only effective when there is complete contact between the user’s head and seals of the muff. This can be difficult with muffs attached to a helmet/hard hat and the seal is also broken when wearing safety glasses.

Hearing protection should never be altered in an attempt to reduce discomfort or because of difficulty hearing spoken words. Altered hearing protectors cannot protect from workplace noise.

### **Hearing Loss**

Noise is all around and work is not the only place you are exposed to loud noise. Steps should be



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taken to protect your hearing in your personal life by keeping a moderate volume on your stereo or radio, especially when wearing headphones. Protection should also be worn when using power tools, mowing grass, riding motorcycles, boats or other loud vehicles and don't forget hunting/shooting.

Noise cannot be eliminated; however, we can reduce our exposure to dangerous levels of noise by using hearing protection, on and off the job. Hearing is something you cannot fix or replace; all you can do is make every effort to preserve what you have.

***Hearing protection should be used not only at work but also when off-duty and exposed to noise.***

**How loud is too loud?** The noise chart below lists average decibel levels for everyday sounds around you.

<b>Painful</b>	<b>Extremely Loud</b>
150 dB = fireworks at 3 feet	110 dB = maximum output of some MP3 players, model airplane, chain saw
140 dB = firearms, jet engine	106 dB = gas lawn mower
130 dB = jackhammer	100 dB = hand drill, pneumatic drill
120 dB = jet plane takeoff, siren	

More “baby boomers”, age 45-65, have diminished hearing than people above 65. Due to loud music and hazardous noise, hearing loss is occurring at a much younger age, one out of every 12 Americans above age 30 now has impaired hearing. To raise awareness about hearing health, the [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association \(ASHA\)](#) developed the award-winning “**Listen To Your Buds**” campaign. The campaign educates parents and the very young about practicing safe listening habits such as turning down the volume and taking listening breaks when they use personal audio technology so they can avoid the devastating, lifelong effects that can accompany hearing loss. Recent research both in the United States and abroad indicates that misuse of the technology has the potential to cause noise-induced hearing loss.

Whether it's rock, classical, hip hop, or something in between, at certain sound levels, repeated exposure to music can cause permanent hearing loss and/or ringing in the ears known as tinnitus. A new term, **music-induced hearing loss**, has been coined to reflect this growing condition.

The Valero Hearing Conservation Program can be found on the Right-To-Know (SHG 5.6). It has been developed in accordance with the OSHA Standard of occupational noise exposure ([1910.95](#)), and delineates the policies and procedures in place to minimize occupational hearing



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loss. This program applies to all company employees with a potential for occupational noise exposures. All company's must implement their own adequate internal program.