

One Size Does Not Fit All - Hearing & Eye Protection

Hearing and eye protection is an important kit for many employees in a variety of industries. It becomes part of their equipment / tools essential for safety at work. However employer responsibility does not end with issuing the staff member with a pair of goggles or ear plugs. The protection needs to be appropriate and useful for the work being carried out.

Hearing Protection:

Noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) is the damage to hearing caused by being exposed to too much noise for too long. It creates enormous problems in daily life for the person who is affected and there is no cure. NIHL is defined as "serious Harm" in the Health & Safety in Employment Act. An employer who knowingly causes serious harm could face serious penalties.

Daily exposure to noise above 85 decibels (dBA) will damage hearing. A good rule of thumb is, a noise hazard probably exists if:

- There is difficulty in understanding what is being said 1 metre away
- There is ringing in your ears (tinnitus) after exposure to noise
- Your hearing seems muffled after leaving a noisy area.

The first step in any workplace assessment is to walk around, observe & listen to where the noise is coming from; identify the sources of this hazard. Noise monitoring should be carried out by an Environmental Specialist to give you a clearer idea of the noise volume over the day.

When considering the protective equipment for your staff, there are some things to consider - **ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL**. Some staff may find ear muffs more comfortable whilst others prefer ear plugs.

There are so many varieties on the market these days it is important to get the right one for the right person & the right environment. Allow staff to try a variety of options. If you have the buy-in of your staff in the decision of what system to use they are more likely to be compliant and wear it as is required. Your local safety equipment rep can help with this. There is little point buying a box of ear plugs for all the staff to use - it is unlikely they will all use them.

Not all hearing protection is equal. Hearing protection must be manufactured to a recognised standard and must be the correct grade for the noise level encountered. So a cheap pair of earmuffs from a local hardware store issued to all staff is not adequate and is unlikely to offer the correct level of protection. OSH have recently updated their classification of hearing protectors and this is available from their website at:

<http://www.osh.govt.nz/publications/booklets/classified-hearing/classified-hearing-protectors.pdf>

Getting the right fit is essential for protecting hearing. Many protectors are designed for northern European males and won't fit Asian, Polynesian peoples or females. Your safety equipment rep can help advise what is the best product for the individual employee. They can also provide education resources on how to use and care for hearing protectors. For example did you know it is currently recommended the earmuff cushion be replaced every 6 months as they do deteriorate? Here is also a simple guide on how to correctly insert earplugs. Many employees do not use them correctly therefore the protection

WELCOME TO OUR SPRING NEWSLETTER

Welcome to our spring newsletter! We always aim to keep you up to date with the latest developments in Occupational Health and Safety. If you have any questions about the articles here, or if we can help with any issues you have at work, please give us a call.

Our Services

- ◆ Independent medical opinions
- ◆ UKOOA/OGUK medical assessments
- ◆ Individual work site assessment
 - Walk through surveys
 - Hazard identification and management
 - Noise, lighting and air quality (dust) monitoring
 - OOS hazard identification and management
 - Workstation assessments
- ◆ Pre-employment medical assessments
 - National and international placements
- ◆ Training for staff and management
 - Correct use of personal protective equipment
 - Stress and fatigue management
 - Influenza pandemic planning
 - Manual handling
- ◆ Health monitoring
 - Work site clinics
 - Absenteeism management
 - Accident investigation
 - Hearing, respiratory, and blood testing
 - Back care
 - Injury management and rehabilitation
 - Gradual return to work programmes
 - Drug and alcohol testing
 - Health checks and wellness programmes
- ◆ New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) driver assessments
- ◆ Maritime New Zealand (MNZ) seafarer examinations
- ◆ Development of individualised health and safety policy and procedures
- ◆ Regular updates through our newsletter, "Solutions"

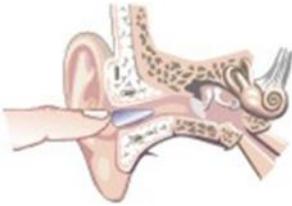
One Size Does Not Fit All ... cont



1. **Roll** the earplug up into a small, thin "snake" with your fingers.



2. **Pull** the top of your ear up and back with your opposite hand to straighten out your ear canal. The rolled-up earplug should slide right in.



3. **Hold** the earplug in with your finger. Count to 20 or 30 out loud while waiting for the plug to expand and fill the ear canal. Your voice will sound muffled when the plug has made a good seal.

Whilst many industries recognise the importance of hearing protection- that is only half the story. Few have taken on the equally important task of reducing workplace noise at the source, i.e. eliminate rather than minimise. This would include:

- maintenance & repair of machinery like worn gears, drive belts, bearings, cutting blades etc.
- buying quieter machinery, or
- using sound dampening devices to stop the noise affecting the worker.

Eye Protection:

A company may issue tools, safety equipment, and some kind of protective clothing, but there is one thing that cannot be issued - a new pair of eyes.

Common eye injuries occurring at work can result from chemicals or foreign objects in the eye and cuts or scrapes on the cornea. Other causes of injuries include splashes with grease and oil, burns from steam, ultraviolet or infrared radiation exposure, and flying wood or metal chips.

As with hearing protection, there are many types of eye protection and the type an individual should wear depends on the job they are doing. Here are a few tips for taking care of safety glasses / goggles:

1. Make sure they fit. If they don't fit properly, staff might be tempted not to wear them. If they slip, seem crooked, or are too tight, take a few minutes and have them adjusted properly.
2. Keep the glasses clean. Dirty glasses lessen visibility. Wash them regularly with mild soap and water or eyeglass cleaner, then polish with a soft cloth or a tissue. Anti-dust and anti-fog sprays work well on both glass and plastic lenses.
3. Keep glasses in a case when not in use. Pits, scratches, or other damage can result if they are stuck in a pocket or tossed a tool box. Damage to lenses can lessen impact-resistance thus, provide less than full protection. Also, don't hang goggles by the elastic band. This can stretch the band so it does not fit properly.
4. Spare pairs of goggles/ face shields should be always available so any scratched or damaged eye protection can be replaced immediately. Scratched and dirty devices reduce vision, cause glare and may contribute to accidents.

There is little point buying a bulk order of goggles and expecting them to fit everyone. People who wear glasses may need a different style of protection that actually fits over their glasses. Prescription safety glasses are available. Please remind employees contact lenses are not designed to protect eyes and safety glasses need to be worn over the top.

Training and education of staff on how to wear their hearing/ eye protection and how to care for it is a key component to having compliance with the wearing of protection. Regular reminders and updates also help.

Role modelling the expected behaviour by Managers coming onto the floor is also important. Don't just "pop" onto the floor without putting on your hearing/ eye protection.

Protective eyewear works best when you know how to use it properly. Combined with machine guards, screened or divided work stations, and other engineering controls, using the correct protective eyewear can help keep you safe from many types of eye hazard.

The general health information in this publication has been researched using reliable sources and is believed to be correct. However individual situations differ and no liability of any kind is undertaken to any person in respect of the information produced. Decisions on your own or others personal health and medical care must be made in consultation with your doctor. These materials are not intended to be legal advice. Therefore, readers should not rely on anything stated, and the author is not liable for any errors or omissions, in the materials in respect of a particular issue or circumstance. The reader must seek his or her own legal advice.

How Can I Help Keep People Safe When They're Drinking at Work?

Christmas is almost upon us and social events at work can be a great way to get your team together, to get to know each other, celebrate successes and relax. These can include things like Friday drinks, boardroom functions, business lunches and Christmas parties. In 2009 ALAC put out a pamphlet on how to keep people safe while drinking at work. Here are their tips which may help when planning your Christmas function.

- Set your expectations in advance. Say that you won't tolerate drunken behaviour.
- Be up front and tell people drink driving isn't your only worry – you don't want any accidents or embarrassing episodes.
- As the employer you're the host. You should implement host responsibility provisions and ensure the function doesn't get out of hand.
- Supply lots of substantial food early on in the event and make sure it's available throughout the function.
- Serve more interesting non-alcoholic drinks than just orange juice. It's surprising how people will really enjoy something like a mocktail for a change.
- Plan some sort of activity so that people have something to do other than just drinking and eating. If you're having the function out of the office choose a location that includes an activity such as bowling, pool, dancing etc.
- Don't keep serving people who are getting intoxicated. Brief your bar staff/waiters if it's an in-house event. If it's on a licensed premise, this shouldn't happen as it is illegal to allow people to become intoxicated.
- Really watch out for the younger staff, particularly those under 18. Check how the law applies if you're the host or taking them out to a licensed premise.
- Arrange for taxis to take people home.
- Model good behaviour yourself.

Please make sure you check your legal obligations before any work event. Our colleagues at Bartlett Law have written an interesting article on claiming sick leave if you have a hang over. Please [follow this link](#) if you want to know more.

NEWSFLASH- Pike River Inquiry Has Been Released.

We believe this report have wide ranging implications for health and safety within NZ, not just the mining industry. We will keep you updated with what this will mean for all NZ businesses.



The team at Work Health Solutions wishes you all a very merry & safe Christmas and a prosperous New Year. We look forward to sharing with you all our thoughts and ideas again in 2013.

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