

Introduction: Occupational Hearing Conservation and Hearing Protectors

Published on Friday, 14 March 2008 11:01



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Regardless of good faith efforts to control noise in the workplace, the hearing protector often stands as the first, last, and only line of defense against occupational noise-induced hearing loss (ONIHl).

ONIHl as an occupational illness is well understood and completely preventable, but prevention requires a thorough understanding of the use and limitations of hearing protection devices (HPD). Appropriate application of HPD is critical if hearing loss is to be prevented in the noisy workplace.

If HPD has been available broadly for more than 30 years, why do noise-exposed workers continue to lose hearing on the job? In large part, this question underlies the contributions in this special focus issue of *The Hearing Review*. While capable of effectively reducing noise exposure, HPD must be properly selected, fitted, and used if they are to prevent hearing loss. The limitations of various types of HPD and issues regarding their use, evaluation, and selection will be discussed in detail in the articles contributed here by leading experts in various aspects of HPD and hearing conservation. Additionally, new technologies, such as field evaluation of HPD and application of electronics in HPD, will be discussed, and special cases and special-needs populations will be addressed.

Our hope is that readers of this edition of *The Hearing Review* will walk away with improved understanding of the issues surrounding selection, use, evaluation, and limitations of HPD. Our objective is to provide you with better information and tools to prevent hearing loss in the noise-exposed workforce, and to leave you better prepared in your fight against ONIHl among the patients and workers you serve.

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