

Hearing protection— What do I *really* need to know?

1. Do I have to wear hearing protection?

Yes, if your work is noisy on most work days.

2. Do I have to wear them *all* day?

Yes, if it's noisy all day. When you leave the noisy workplace, you can take them off.

3. How noisy is noisy? If you have to raise your voice to be heard by someone a meter (3 feet) away, then it's probably noisy. To be sure, you may ask your employer to do a noise level assessment.

4. Who pays for hearing protection?

Employers supply and pay for it. When you need to replace worn out or poorly fitting protection, your employer pays for that too.

5. What kind should I wear?

This depends on a number of factors. The two most important are:

a. Noise level: The noisier the workplace, the greater sound reduction you need. For *most* workplaces, Class B earmuffs or earplugs are okay. For very noisy jobs, Class A may be more appropriate.

b. Comfort: If they're not comfortable, you'll want to take them off. Factors that affect comfort include the size and shape of your head or ear canals, the temperature of your workplace, other protective equipment you wear, and your need to listen to speech or other signals. If earplugs are more comfortable than earmuffs, wear them!

6. Really, what's the best hearing protector—my employer will pay for anything.

The best is the one you'll wear all day in noise—seriously.

7. I have a hearing loss; can I wear my hearing aids turned off as protection?

No—hearing aids are *not* designed to block out noise at work. Wear proper devices designed to protect your hearing.

8. I can't hear to do my work or feel safe when I wear hearing protection!

Regular earplugs or earmuffs may not be the right choice. They may block out too much sound. You may need a "specialty product," such as amplifying earmuffs or uniform attenuation earmuffs or earplugs. These products are designed to let more sound through, to improve listening.

For more information about any of these, or other, hearing protection questions, speak to a safety equipment specialist or call WorkSafeBC's Prevention Information Line 604.276.3100 and ask to speak to the occupational audiologist.

See also the WorkSafeBC *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation*, Part 7 "Noise and Hearing Conservation," as well as the Canadian Standards Association *Standard Z94.2 Hearing Protection*. Visit worksafebc.com for the *Regulation* as well as more information about hearing protection.