

Contributors



Lucy Hyslop

As a ski-instructor with a safety-first focus, Lucy Hyslop is always interested in speaking with safety experts. In this issue's cover story (page 7) she was amazed to learn how complex the compound can be when mixing metals and materials together.



Lynn Welburn

In working on a Safety Talk on WHMIS (page 16), writer Lynn Welburn learned how the daily lives of B.C. workers can be affected by globalization through international product labelling. No stranger to global travel, Lynn enjoys visiting Montevideo, Uruguay, where she hopes to someday retire.



Gail Johnson

Journalist Gail Johnson signs her emails: "Make the world a better place in your own small way every day." In this edition, she lives her tagline by looking into how young workers can promote health and safety through the student safety video contest (page 24).



Tanya Colledge

Tanya Colledge is a communications specialist from South Surrey, B.C. and has been writing for WorkSafeBC for five years. In this issue she speaks with some of the heroic winners of the NAOSH awards (page 21).

Ask an Officer

Job-related hearing loss preventable with conservation program in place



Sandra Toon
Occupational safety officer

Region: Abbotsford
Years on the job: 2

This month we talked with WorkSafeBC occupational safety officer Sandra Toon about one of the most common occupational health hazards, noise-induced hearing loss.

Q. When is hearing protection needed?

A. If you need to raise your voice in a workplace conversation so that the other person can hear you, you probably need hearing protection. Because hearing loss can be caused by exposure to one loud noise or by repeated exposure to consistent noise, you are at risk for hearing loss from excessive noise levels even if your worksite is only occasionally loud.

When you're exposed to excessive noise, damage occurs to tiny sensory cells deep inside your ear, so there's no way to see the damage, and there is no pain; but exposure to excessive noise will cause permanent damage. Often, the first sign is that you won't be able to hear high-pitched sounds as well as before, which will only be evident from a hearing test.

The good news is that hearing loss from noise exposure in the workplace is preventable with proper hearing protection devices in place.

Q: What are an employer's responsibilities for hearing protection?

A. It's the employer's responsibility to reduce the noise levels or the amount of time spent doing noisy tasks, so that they are not hazardous to workers. If noise levels cannot be reduced to a safe level, the employer must provide appropriate hearing protection and implement a hearing conservation program. If you aren't sure if your noise levels are hazardous, you need to test your worksite.

Q. What should be covered in our hearing conservation program?

- A. Your program must be reviewed annually and should include these six basic components:
- 1 Noise exposure measurements you've taken
 - 2 Education and training for workers on the risks of noise and the proper use and maintenance of hearing protection
 - 3 Engineered noise controls
 - 4 Hearing protection devices
 - 5 Hazard awareness, such as warning signs
 - 6 Hearing tests for workers

Q. What should I consider when choosing hearing protection for my workers?

- A. Make sure you follow the Canadian Standards Association standard for hearing devices. It explains the main factors, including noise exposure, the worker's hearing ability, the use of other personal protective equipment, the temperature and climate, the physical constraints of the worker or work activity, and the comfort of the hearing device.

These factors are all equally important. If the hearing protection meets the first five factors, but is not comfortable for the worker to wear, then the worker will probably not wear it — keeping him or her at risk for hearing loss.

It would be ideal if all hearing protection was fit tested. It's like a respirator: if it's not fitting the workers properly, it's not protecting them.

Q: Our workers wear earplugs but still complain about noise on the job. What's going on?

- A. You might be dealing with some of the most common problems with hearing protection:
- 1 Workers not wearing it, or not wearing it properly. If the earplugs are sticking out of their

ears — as often happens with the orange foam plugs — that could be a sign the workers don't have them in properly. Either the size of the earplug is not right for them and/or they need more training. Hearing protection is not “one size fits all,” so it is important to provide a variety of different sizes and types.

- 2 Using the wrong type or class of protection. A worker using a chainsaw probably needs something with much higher protection than a truck driver does. Because some jobsites have the need for a higher protection for one job task, an employer might provide only the highest level of protection thinking that they are ensuring that all workers are covered. This creates a new issue called over-protection. Too much protection might lead a worker to not hear warning alarms or a two-way radio being used for communicating with other workers on the site. Often, if these workers are wearing foam earplugs, I will find their hearing protection has been pulled out of their ears or is hanging half out, allowing them to hear the signals or radio communication, but not protecting them from the noise exposure.

Q: Where can I get more information on hearing loss prevention?

- A. Consult your joint health and safety committee, or ask our officers for help. At worksafebc.com you'll find many free resources, including:
- The [Sound Advice: A Guide to Hearing Loss Prevention Programs](#) booklet
 - The [Hear for Good: Preventing Noise Exposure at Work](#) booklet
 - Information on [hearing testing](#)

Looking for answers to your specific health and safety questions? Send them to us at worksafemagazine@worksafebc.com, and we'll consider them for our next Ask an Officer feature. ☺

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