

Contributors



Sarah Ripplinger

Sarah is a marketer, writer, editor, and journalist. She brings us two articles in this issue. In our cover story, she writes about the need for safety protocols and procedures for workers who handle electric vehicles and the high-voltage batteries that power them (page 7). In our “Safety spotlight,” she writes about how an employer’s investment in safety is preventing musculoskeletal injuries (page 12).



Gord Woodward

Gord has run his own communications and business-consulting firm for 27 years. He brings us “Ask an officer” on hearing loss prevention (right) and writes about how to reduce risks when transporting agricultural workers to and from worksites (page 16).



Chandra Chisholm

Chandra is the assistant editor of *WorkSafe Magazine*. She writes about transitioning from COVID-19 safety plans to communicable disease prevention as the province moves ahead with Step 3 of its Restart plan (page 18).

Ask an officer

Preventing the most common work-related disease: hearing loss



Felix Wang

Occupational Hygiene Officer

Region: Port Moody

Years on the job: 4

We talked with occupational hygiene officer Felix Wang about employer responsibilities for hearing loss prevention, and WorkSafeBC’s new Hearing Test Submission (HTS) system. The system — the first of its kind in Canada — provides detailed information aimed at helping you improve your hearing conservation program.

Q. My workplace has a lot of loud noise. How can this affect my workers?

A. It’s not the first thing people think of when they imagine workplace hazards, but noise-induced hearing loss is one of the most common work-related diseases. Too much exposure to workplace noise can cause permanent and irreversible damage. It typically happens gradually and can be a serious concern for workers of all ages.

Q. As an employer, what are my responsibilities for hearing loss prevention and hearing protection?

A. You’re responsible for determining if workers are exposed to hazardous noise in your workplace. If they are, you must implement a noise control and hearing conservation program. In most cases, measuring the noise in your workplace is the first step.

You need a hearing conservation program if the noise level in your workplace regularly exceeds 85 decibels over an 8-hour work day, or if there is impact noise that exceeds 140 decibels.

If you’re in the construction industry or if you have labels on equipment indicating hazardous levels of noise, it’s already been established that your workers are exposed to potentially harmful noise.

Your program needs to show how you will control the risk of noise-induced hearing loss. When hazardous noise can’t be eliminated or reduced by other means, you’re responsible for providing appropriate hearing protection for your workers, such as earplugs or earmuffs. Remember, each worker and workplace is unique, and there’s no

one-size-fits-all type of hearing protection. It's important to provide the right type of hearing protection for your work environment, as well as different styles and sizes to allow for worker preference, comfort, and fit.

Q. What do I include in a noise control and hearing conservation program?

A. You need a written plan to document how you will reduce the level of noise and other ways you will protect workers from hearing loss. Your program must include noise measurement, worker education and training, engineered noise controls, hearing protection devices, hazard awareness (including warning signs), and hearing tests for workers conducted by an industrial audiometric technician. There is a [template](#) on [worksafebc.com](#) that can help you create your program.

All the elements are connected, but without education and training, your program is not complete. Make sure workers thoroughly understand the risks and the use, maintenance, and limitations of their hearing protection equipment.

At a minimum, you should review your program annually.

Q. How will the new Hearing Test Submission (HTS) system benefit me?

A. The HTS system makes it easier for industrial audiometric technicians to submit a hearing test to us. It also lets them create a Hearing Loss Prevention Report for you to use to inform your hearing conservation program.

Audiometric technicians benefit from the new system's interface that cuts submission time and lets them compare a worker's hearing to their last test, regardless of who did previous tests. They can see, on the spot, if the worker's hearing is getting worse.

Workers also benefit from this real-time data. The technician can consult with workers at the

time of the test if they detect changes in hearing consistent with noise-induced hearing loss.

And employers benefit from having more information to improve hearing loss prevention. When you log into the Hearing Loss Prevention System, you can see all your workers' test results, and you can download reports to identify and address gaps in your hearing conservation program. There is a guide to [understanding workers' hearing test results](#) on [worksafebc.com](#).


Q. What can workers do to protect themselves from noise hazards in the workplace?

A. Workers need to know the noise risks and hazards in your workplace, so make sure that's part of your training and orientation program. Be sure they understand the control measures you have in place, such as using a tool that generates less noise than another. They also need to know how to wear hearing protection properly, make sure it fits, and use it whenever they are in a noisy environment.

Q. Where can I get more information on noise-induced hearing loss?

A. We're here to help. Visit [worksafebc.com/hearing-loss-prevention](#) for resources. You'll find a [noise control and hearing conservation program template](#) and samples for both small and large employers, information on selecting and using hearing protection devices, and tips for protecting your and your workers' hearing.

You can also contact our Prevention Information Line with questions. Call 604.276.3100 in the Lower Mainland, and toll-free at 1.888.621.SAFE in other areas of B.C.

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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