



Noise Exposure and Hearing Conservation in Plants, Paving, and Heavy Equipment Operations

Hearing loss is one of the most common occupational illnesses in construction and material production. Unlike many workplace injuries, hearing damage develops gradually and is permanent. Employees working in crushed stone operations, asphalt plants, paving crews, and around heavy equipment may be exposed to noise levels capable of causing long term hearing loss.

Common Noise Hazards

High noise levels are often generated by:

- Crushers, screens, conveyors, and generators
- Asphalt plant burners, fans, and motors
- Pavers, milling machines, rollers, and compactors
- Haul trucks, loaders, excavators, and dozers
- Air compressors, impact tools, and hydraulic breakers
- Multiple machines operating in the same work area

Noise levels above 85 decibels over an eight hour workday can damage hearing. Many construction and aggregate operations regularly exceed this level.

Protecting Workers

The most effective hearing conservation programs focus on reducing noise whenever possible.

- **Engineering Controls:** Maintain equipment to reduce excessive noise. Install mufflers, silencers, and sound barriers. Replace worn components that increase noise. Consider noise levels when purchasing equipment.
- **Administrative Controls:** Limit time spent in high noise areas. Rotate workers when practical. Post signs identifying hearing protection zones.
- **Hearing Protection:** Foam or reusable earplugs, earmuffs, and dual protection in extremely noisy environments. Workers must be trained on proper fit and use. Hearing protection that is worn incorrectly may provide little benefit.

Warning Signs

Employees should report:

- Ringing or buzzing in the ears
- Difficulty understanding conversations
- Muffled hearing after work
- Frequently increasing volume on devices

Key Takeaway

An effective hearing conservation program includes noise monitoring, employee training, hearing protection, and regular evaluation of workplace exposures. Protecting hearing is more than a compliance requirement. It helps ensure workers maintain their quality of life both on and off the job.

Protect Your Hearing Today. The Hearing You Save Will Last a Lifetime.