



*For Maintenance and Custodians*



EDUCATIONAL  
SERVICE  
DISTRICT 112

## Can you hear me now?

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Our ears are amazing! But our ears do have their limits. Excessive noise can cause damage to the nerves in the inner ear. Our ears can recover from a short exposure to loud noise, but being around too much noise over an extended period of time will eventually cause nerve damage and hearing loss. The louder the noise and longer the exposure, the greater chance permanent damage will occur. A really loud noise, such as a gunshot, can cause immediate hearing loss, but that doesn't happen too often on the job. Continued exposure to workplace noise over a number of years could lead to gradual, but permanent hearing loss.

### How much noise is too much?

Noise is measured in units called "decibels", abbreviated as "dB". Noise levels can range from 1 dB (near silence) to 60 dB (quiet conversation) to 140 dB (a jet engine). Scientific studies have shown that people exposed to daily noise levels of 85 decibels and above over 8 hours or longer will gradually lose their hearing over time. If you have to shout to be heard by another person 3 feet from you, the noise level is probably above 85 decibels. Remember, the louder the noise level and the longer the exposure, the greater the risk of hearing loss.

Here are some noise levels of commonly used equipment:

Back Hoe 85-95 decibels  
Chain Saw 110 decibels  
Front-end Loader 90-95 decibels  
Gunshot 140 decibels  
Jackhammer 112 decibels

Lawn Mower 90 decibels  
Tractor 95-105 decibels  
Circular Saw 90-100 decibels  
Vacuum Cleaner 85-95 decibels

### How can you protect your hearing?

The most obvious way to protect your hearing is to avoid loud noise whenever possible. At the workplace, reducing or eliminating the source of the noise is the best way. Obviously on some jobs that is impossible and hearing protection should be worn. Hearing protectors generally come in two types: earplugs and earmuffs. They should also be worn when using power tools, noisy yard equipment, firearms, or when riding a motorcycle or a snowmobile.

Earplugs are small inserts that fit into the outer ear canal. They must be sealed snugly so the entire circumference of the ear canal is blocked. An improperly fitted, dirty, or worn-out plug may not seal properly and can result in irritation of the ear canal. Plugs are available in a variety of shapes and sizes to fit individual ear canals. For people who have trouble keeping them in their ears, custom molded plugs can be made to fit your ear.

Earmuffs fit over the outer ear to form an air seal so the entire circumference of the ear canal is blocked. They are held in place by an adjustable band.

Hearing loss is serious. Once you lose your hearing from noise, the damage is permanent.