



A Guide to Noise Induced Hearing Loss

Noise induced hearing loss

The *Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act 1981* (the Act) makes it compulsory for employers to arrange baseline hearing tests for all workers in prescribed workplaces. It is the employer's responsibility to arrange and pay for all WorkCover WA audiometric tests.

All workers employed in a prescribed workplace for the first time must have a baseline hearing test within twelve months of commencing employment. Testing is required of all workers, even if they are wearing hearing protection.

It is important to note that a worker only requires a baseline hearing test once in his or her lifetime. Workers may request in writing a subsequent test annually from their employer.

What is a prescribed workplace?

A prescribed workplace exists when workers receive a personal noise dose of 90dB(A) or above during an eight hour day, or its equivalent, and where such a day is representative of the worker's typical work practices. As an example, 90dB(A) is approximately equal to the noise from an idling heavy motor truck at a distance of one metre.

Any workers who receive noise above the peak exposure of 140dB(lin) on one or more occasions, even for a short time, will also require testing. As an example, 140dB(lin) is approximately equal to the peak noise level from a mid to high calibre firearm at the user's ear.



What is a baseline hearing test?

A baseline hearing test is the initial audiometric testing conducted to establish the worker's baseline (reference) or overall percentage loss of hearing (PLH). The PLH of all subsequent tests will then be compared to the baseline PLH. A worker may be required to undergo a baseline full audiological assessment as part of the baseline hearing test, however this is only required by a relatively small percentage of the population. If required, the assessment is paid for by the employer.

It is the employer's responsibility to arrange and pay for baseline and subsequent tests. Workers must be notified of the time and date of the test. It is the responsibility of the employer and worker to ensure that the worker is not exposed to more than 80dB(A) for 16 hours immediately preceding the test. As an example, 80dB(A) is approximately equal to the noise of a vacuum cleaner at a distance of one metre.

Only testers approved by WorkCover WA can conduct the tests as the testing environment and equipment must also meet stringent standards. A directory of approved audiometric service providers is available from the WorkCover WA website: www.workcover.wa.gov.au

Test results

All test results must be submitted to WorkCover WA, and a copy provided to the worker, within one month of the test taking place. The results are strictly confidential and access cannot be granted to anyone without the worker's written consent.

Compensation for noise induced hearing loss

If a subsequent audiometric test shows an increase in overall hearing loss of at least ten percent from the baseline PLH, WorkCover WA will advise both the worker and the employer of the requirement for further testing to determine if there is a compensable loss.

A subsequent full audiological assessment and examination by an ear, nose and throat specialist (if required) will be arranged to determine the nature and extent of the hearing loss. Compensation cannot be claimed for noise induced hearing loss which occurred before March 1991.

Disclaimer

This fact sheet is intended to provide general information only. You should not act or omit to act on the basis of anything contained herein. You should seek appropriate legal/professional advice about your particular circumstances.



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