

a guide to
Noise Induced Hearing Loss



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About WorkCover WA

WorkCover WA is the government agency responsible for overseeing the workers' compensation and injury management system in Western Australia. This includes monitoring compliance with the *Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act 1981* (the Act), informing and educating workers, employers and others about workers' compensation and injury management and providing an independent dispute resolution system.

Noise induced hearing loss (NIHL) under the Act

Under the Act, it is compulsory for employers to arrange and pay for baseline hearing tests for all workers in prescribed "noisy" workplaces.

All workers employed in a prescribed workplace for the first time must have a baseline hearing test within 12 months of commencing employment, regardless of whether the worker is wearing hearing protection.

When is a workplace "noisy"?

A workplace (or part of a workplace) is considered to be "noisy" (a prescribed workplace) where a worker receives or is likely to receive a personal noise dose of 90dB(A) or above during an eight hour shift and this is typical of the work environment. This is about the level of noise created by an idling heavy truck at a distance of one metre.

Furthermore, any worker who receives noise above a peak exposure of 140dB(lin) at any time, will require testing. This level is approximately equal to the peak noise 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 test that establishes a worker's baseline (reference) or overall percentage loss of hearing.

This result is the benchmark against which future tests are compared to determine the possible level of occupational hearing loss and potential compensation.

When is a subsequent test required?

Following a baseline hearing test, workers may make a request to their employer in writing for subsequent testing on an annual basis. While subsequent tests are compulsory only when requested by a worker, employers are encouraged to provide regular testing wherever possible.

Did you know...It is the employer's responsibility to arrange and pay for the baseline and any subsequent hearing tests?

Did you know...A personal noise dose of 90db(A) or above is about the level of noise created by an idling heavy motor truck at a distance of one metre?

Arranging a hearing test

Employers are required to use testers approved by WorkCover WA. The testing environment and equipment must also meet stringent standards. Employers must ensure their worker is given written notification of the time and date of the test using Form 18 (Notice of Arrangement of Audiometric Test). This form and a directory of approved NIHL service providers can be downloaded from the WorkCover WA website (www.workcover.wa.gov.au).

It is also important to ensure the worker is not exposed to more than 80dB(A) for 16 hours prior to the test. This level is approximately equal to the noise created by a household vacuum cleaner at a distance of one metre. If you are a worker and your employer has not organised testing for you within 12 months of starting the job, you can raise the issue with your employer or call WorkCover WA's NIHL section on 9388 5661 for advice.

Test results

Test results are maintained and monitored by WorkCover WA. The audiometric officer is required to submit test results to WorkCover WA and provide the worker with a copy of the report within one month of a hearing test. Results are strictly confidential.

Did you know... A worker should not be exposed to more than 80dB(A) for 16 hours prior to a baseline or subsequent hearing test?

Compensation for noise induced hearing loss

If a subsequent test result indicates a loss of 10% or more in a worker's hearing since their baseline test, WorkCover WA will advise both the worker and the employer. Further testing will be required to confirm if the worker qualifies for NIHL compensation.

Making a claim

1. WorkCover WA will notify the worker if a subsequent test result indicates a hearing loss of 10% or more.
2. WorkCover WA will arrange further testing with an audiologist and an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist if required.
3. If the ENT report confirms a hearing loss of 10% or more, WorkCover WA will send a claim form to the worker. The worker must complete and return the form to WorkCover WA.
4. WorkCover WA will then forward the completed form to the employer, who must lodge the form with their insurer within 5 working days.

Please note: Compensation cannot be claimed for noise induced hearing loss which occurred before March 1991.

For more information, contact WorkCover WA's NIHL section on (08) 9388 5661 or visit the WorkCover WA website at www.workcover.wa.gov.au

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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