

Noise Induced Hearing Loss

Information sheet



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) and WorkCover WA

Under the Act, it is compulsory for employers to arrange and pay for baseline and subsequent hearing tests for all workers in a prescribed workplace. This is commonly referred to as a "noisy" workplace.

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" 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 motor truck at a distance of one metre.

If a worker is exposed to noise above a peak exposure of 140dB(lin) at any time, testing is required. 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.

Arranging a hearing test

Employers are required to use testers approved by WorkCover WA. The testing environment and equipment must meet Australian 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 a worker's employer has not organised testing within 12 months of starting the job, they can raise the issue with their employer or call WorkCover WA on **1300 794 744**.

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.

Test results

Hearing 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 audiogram test within one month. Test results registered to WorkCover WA are strictly confidential and will only be released on written consent of the worker.

Further testing is required to confirm the worker's eligibility to pursue a potential NIHL claim to seek compensation.

Noise induced hearing loss claims

There are two types of claims for NIHL:

First election – where a worker has lost 10% or more hearing and the loss is work related.

Subsequent election – refers to further hearing loss, where a worker loses an additional 5% of hearing and the loss is work related.

Making a claim

If a worker's subsequent hearing test result indicates a hearing loss of 10% or more, or a further 5% loss since their baseline test, WorkCover WA will notify and send the worker a Form 18 and Form 404 – *Further Testing Nomination*. Workers who elect to proceed with a potential NIHL claim must submit these forms to their employer.

An employer must arrange and pay for the worker to undertake further testing with an audiologist and return the completed forms to the worker who is to submit Form 18 to the audiologist on the day of the test.

If the hearing test undertaken by the audiologist confirms the required criteria of hearing loss, WorkCover WA will notify the worker. The worker is to arrange the appointment with an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Specialist selected by the employer (noted on Form 404). It is the employer's responsibility to pay for the ENT specialist.

If the ENT report confirms a hearing loss of 10% or more, or a further 5% loss from the initial baseline, WorkCover WA will send a claim form to the worker. The worker must complete and return the form to WorkCover WA.

WorkCover WA will then forward the completed form to the employer, who must lodge the claim form with their insurer within 5 working days.

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

