WEEK 26 MID-SEASON, FULL CREWS RUNNING (JUNE) · ~5 MIN READ · ONTARIO CONSTRUCTION

Noise & Hearing Protection

You won't feel your hearing going. It goes a little at a time, and one day you're asking people to repeat themselves and missing the TV. Noise damage is permanent — there's no fixing it once it's gone.

The hazard

Loud tools and equipment wear your hearing down for good. Saws, grinders, jackhammers, and heavy equipment easily pass 85 decibels. Ontario's noise regulation sets the exposure limit at **85 dBA averaged over an 8-hour shift** — and it expects the employer to protect you **without relying on hearing protection**, except where that isn't practicable. Plugs and muffs are the fallback, not the plan. Noise also causes tinnitus — ringing that may never stop.

It's not just how loud, it's how loud **and** for how long. Every 3 decibels of extra noise halves the time it takes to reach the same daily dose:

NOISE LEVEL	EQUIVALENT 8-HOUR EXPOSURE LIMIT REACHED IN
85 dBA	8 hours (full shift)
88 dBA	4 hours
91 dBA	2 hours
94 dBA	1 hour
97 dBA	30 minutes
100 dBA	15 minutes

Read that as the limit, not as a safe period. It's the point at which the day's allowance is used up — a gas saw or jackhammer can burn a whole shift's worth in minutes.

What to do

- **Lower the noise at the source first — that's the actual requirement.** Pick the quieter tool where there is one (electric or battery over gas, a hydraulic breaker over a jackhammer), and put distance or a barrier between people and the loudest work.
- **Cut the time.** Rotate people off the noisiest jobs, and sequence the work so nobody soaks up the whole dose.
- **Get the exposure assessed rather than guessed.** The employer works out the actual dose for these tasks; that's what decides whether controls are enough and what protection is needed.
- **If you have to raise your voice to talk to someone an arm's length away, that's the cue to stop and get it assessed** — treat it as a warning sign, not a measurement.
- **Wear protection matched to the measured exposure**, chosen on its attenuation rating and the manufacturer's data — and be trained on fitting it. Over-protection is a real thing too: if you can't hear a signaller or a reversing machine, that's its own hazard.
- Roll and insert foam plugs fully so they seal in the canal, and keep tools maintained — worn gear runs louder.

Watch out for

- Ringing in your ears after a shift. That's early damage talking.
- Earplugs worn loose or half-in — they barely help.
- Pulling plugs out "just for a minute" beside loud work.
- Treating hearing protection as the whole answer when the saw could have been a quieter one.

Talk it over

- What are the loudest jobs today, and is there a quieter tool or more distance available for any of them?
- Has anyone actually measured what we're exposed to on this task — and if not, who arranges that?
- Does everyone have protection that fits, and can we still hear the machines and each other?

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