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Compensation Insurance and workplace safety



## Protect against hearing loss in the workplace

*SCF Arizona your Work Comp Specialist*

Provided by Mike Felix  
Association Coordinator

About 30 million U.S. workers face noise levels in the workplace that could damage their hearing.

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, an employer is required to have a formal hearing conservation program for their workers when workplace noise levels reach a consistent 85 decibels or above during a normal 8-hour day (a power lawn mower can emit 90 decibels and a jackhammer 110 decibels of noise).

SCF Arizona reminds all employers and employees that preventing hearing loss due to workplace noise levels is a dual responsibility.

“The employer’s responsibility is to test and see if there are any hazards,” says SCF Loss Control Consultant Gerry Coley. “If there is, they have to put a program in place and provide the personal protective equipment.

“The employee has to take the initiative to wear the PPE. If he doesn’t, it’s his hearing that will be damaged.”

The most common PPE used to guard against hearing loss are ear muffs and ear plugs. Both come in various types and sizes. It’s important that the worker use the ear plug that best fits his ear and ear canal because they are not one size fits all, point out hearing loss experts.

A hearing conservation program consists of providing the proper PPE when noise levels cannot be engineered out or controlled through work practices, such as rotating workers to limit exposure. Examples of engineering out high noise levels include erecting sound barriers around the noise source or placing the source in an isolated section of the workplace.

The employer’s hearing program also must provide annual hearing tests, also known as audiograms, to workers functioning in high noise level conditions. If it is determined that a worker experiences a hearing loss of 10 decibels or more due to workplace exposure, further steps must be taken to reduce noise levels for that worker. It would also trigger mandatory training and PPE usage for all exposed employees.

To monitor noise levels, employers can hire an environmental health safety consultant or an industrial hygienist. The Arizona Division of Occupational Safety and Health Consultation Services offers employers free noise monitoring in the workplace upon request, (602) 542-1769.

To learn more about hearing loss prevention in the workplace, visit [www.scfaz.com](http://www.scfaz.com) to order a hearing loss brochure and beginning in March, SCF’s online Safety Net will feature a video on the topic. SCF Arizona your workers’ compensation resource can be reached by calling (866) 284-2694.

For more information on establishing a hearing conservation program, visit OSHA’s webpage on Noise and Hearing Conservation, <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/noisehearingconservation/hcps.html>.

*If you would like more information on workplace safety please contact your SCF Association Coordinator.*

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### **UPCOMING SCF ARIZONA EVENTS:**

**Tucson Safety Works Expo March 16, 2010, details and registration information at [www.regonline.com/swtucson10](http://www.regonline.com/swtucson10)**