

# Hearing Protectors

**There are two types of hearing protectors available:**

- Ear muffs consisting of a headband and ear cup with a soft outer ring or cushion fitting tightly against the ear or sides of the head around the ear
- Ear plugs worn in the external ear canal or in the entrance to the external ear canal

**The type of hearing protection selected depends on the noise exposure levels.**

**There are three classes of hearing protectors:**

**Class A** — used when noise exposure levels are between 95 dBA (Lex) and 105 dBA (Lex). Generally, hearing protectors with a noise reduction rating (NRR) of 24 will fit into this category. The noise reduction rating lists the amount of decibels that the protectors will reduce the noise levels.

**Class B** — used when noise levels are between 90 dBA (Lex) and 95 dBA (Lex). Generally, hearing protectors with NRR between 17 and 24 will fit into this category.

**Class C** — used when noise levels are less than 90 dBA (Lex). Generally, hearing protectors with NRR of less than 17 will fit into this category. At noise levels above 105 dBA (Lex), using earplugs and earmuffs together is recommended.

## Care and Use of Hearing Protectors

- Select and fit hearing protectors carefully to make sure they give effective protection and cause minimum discomfort to the user.
- Repair or replace any worn out seals promptly. Let workers choose from several effective types of hearing protectors. They are more likely to use equipment that is comfortable for them.
- Instruct workers to replace disposable earplugs every day and clean reusable ones regularly.
- Hearing protectors must be worn — and worn correctly — at all times when working in harmful noise environments.
- Properly selected and worn protectors can provide effective protection from high exposures, but their continued use can be very inconvenient.

## Regulatory Requirements

Workplaces in which noise exposure may be a problem must have the noise exposure levels assessed. If average noise exposure levels in a workplace are 80 dBA or lower, no action is required. However, noise exposure levels need periodic checking to ensure they remain at safe levels. If your workplace noise exposure level is above 80 dBA, programs to protect your hearing are required, as shown below.

All Workplaces Above 80 dBA (Lex)	All Workplaces Above 85 dBA (Lex)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Periodic noise exposure measurements must be taken and workers informed of the results.</li> <li>• All workers must receive training about the hazards of the level of noise they experience or are likely to experience.</li> <li>• If requested by a worker, the employer must provide hearing protectors and instruct the worker in selection, use and maintenance of hearing protection.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All measures taken for 80 dBA exposure must also be taken for 85 dBA exposure.</li> <li>• Employers must determine the practicality of using sound control measures.</li> <li>• If sound control measures are not practical, work practice controls must be considered.</li> <li>• If sound control measures do not limit the exposure to 85 dBA (Lex) or less:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hearing protection is mandatory.</li> <li>• Information on hearing protector limitations and instruction on their fitting and care must be provided to workers.</li> <li>• Periodic reassessment of the practicality of engineering and work practice controls to limit noise exposure is required.</li> <li>• Audiometric tests must be performed on workers no later than 70 days after workers are initially exposed to the workplace noise level and once every year after the initial test.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Warning signs indicating that the area has a harmful noise level must be posted prominently at the entrance to all work areas where sound is above 85 dBA.</li> </ul>