

LISTEN UP!

Potential hearing loss is a concern for you and your workers. Protect your team with a new, free training course.

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Hear this loud and clear: A 25-year-old Green Industry worker regularly exposed to occupational noise without hearing protection may have the hearing of a 50-year-old person who is not exposed.

After years of noise exposure, the inner ear nerves die and you slowly, permanently lose the ability to hear and understand speech. You hardly notice the difference until you have a 9-decibel (dB) loss. At a 25-dB loss it's difficult to understand speech. You also may develop tinnitus (constant ringing in your ears) and other health problems such as high blood pressure. In addition to health and quality of life concerns, hearing loss plagues society, companies and workers with disability payments and the costs to acquire and maintain hearing aids.

These findings and others are revealed in one of two new safety training resources from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), developed under a Susan Harwood grant from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Both courses, "How Do We Protect Our Ears?" and "How Do We Protect Our Bodies?" are free and available in English or Spanish to the entire industry. Each module takes two hours to complete and is designed to be presented by a supervisor with safety experience, by safety personnel or by professional trainers knowledgeable about the land care industry.

Visit landcarenetwork.org/riskmgmt/training.cfm to download the free training materials, including interactive flash training modules, an instructor guide, trainee worksheets, handouts, a game and posters.







Is workplace noise a concern for you?

In the landscape industry, workplace noise is almost always a concern, considering the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health recommends that all worker exposures to noise should be controlled below a level equivalent to 85 dBA for eight hours. Much of the industry's equipment runs louder than that.

If you're unsure whether to be concerned, consider the following checklist. "Yes" to any of these questions may mean you have too much noise at work and/or already have some hearing damage.

- › Must raise voice to talk to someone 3 feet away.
- › Can't hear coins jingle in pocket at work.
- › Ringing or hollow sound in ears after work.

EAR PROTECTION OPTIONS: PROS & CONS		
TYPE	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Roll down plugs 	Can be very comfortable Noise reduction rating (NRR) is readily available Disposable, no cleaning required	Most difficult to wear correctly Need clean hands to insert
Premolded plugs 	Easy to insert, come in different sizes Can be inserted with dirty hands Disposable or reusable	Good fit may be difficult Can be uncomfortable
Ear muffs 	Easiest to use Can attach to a hard hat Reusable	Can be uncomfortable May feel heavy/bulky
Banded ear caps 	Easy to put on/take off Can be inserted with dirty hands Reusable	Good fit may be difficult Band may squeeze your head Your voice may sound loud to you

- › Clients complain about job noise.
- › Trouble hearing well after work.
- › Tools have noise warnings.
- › After time away from work, noises seem louder.
- › Company has OSHA noise violations.
- › Workplace noise measured at 80-plus dB.

What can be done?

There are four options to reduce workers' risk of hearing damage.

- 1 Modify noise sources.** Use quieter equipment and ensure it's being properly cleaned and maintained.
- 2 Rotate work tasks.** Work less time with noisy equipment, alternating noisy and less noisy tasks through work planning and scheduling.
- 3 Increase distance from noise.** Move away from noisy equipment. Doubling your distance from the source cuts noise by a factor of four.

4 Use hearing protection. Properly select, fit and use hearing protection devices (HPDs), such as plugs or muffs. They can reduce noise exposure 7 dBA to 26 dBA.

How much does ear protection help?

Hearing protection devices block noise from entering the ear canal. Worn properly and regularly, ear protection can bring risk way down, offering noise reduction rates (NRRs) of 8 dB to 25 dB. (See the chart above for a comparison of hearing protection options.)

To select the best HPD, determine your noise exposure, then choose a protector based on the best NRR, comfort, ease of proper use and ease of communication. Remember, cotton, wax and headphones do not protect your ears. The best hearing protection is the one you wear. **LM**