Hearing Loss Prevention
Adapting the Hearing Conservation Program for Agriculture

Noise exposure in agriculture impacts all age groups from youth to older adults - not just the typical workforce age population. The agricultural worksite may also be a home, exposing non-working family members to noise that is loud enough to cause hearing loss.

**Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL):** permanent impairment resulting from exposure to high levels of noise. NIHL can result from either a one-time exposure to noise (burst) or from repeated exposure to loud noises over time.

According to the American Hearing Resource Foundation, one in ten Americans has hearing loss that affects his/her ability to understand normal speech. Hearing loss can be caused by illness or biological issues, but can also result from exposure to noise that is too loud.

**Decibel Levels of Everyday Sounds**

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- **Too Loud**

**Hearing Conservation Program (HCP):** a designed intervention program to prevent hearing loss. An HCP is required when noise levels measure at 85 dB or higher (OSHA's Action Level).

**OSHA Hearing Conservation Program**

OSHA Hearing Conservation Program requirements do not apply to all of the agricultural workforce, but can be used to guide best management. If you work in the agricultural industry and have 11 or more employees, you could be cited under the General Duty Clause, with the General Industry standard, 29 CFR 1910.95 used as a reference. The rule states an employer must administer a continuing and effective hearing conservation program and make hearing protection available whenever employee noise exposures are at or above the action level. Reference: 29 CFR1910.95(c)(2)
**OSHA Hearing Conservation Program Decision Algorithm**

A **Hearing Conservation Program** has the following key components:

- Ongoing noise level monitoring (personal or environmental)
- Training (at least annually) for workers on the need for and use of hearing protection
- Appropriate hearing protection provided by employer for all workers exposed to noise above the action level
- Audiometric testing provided for workers by trained and certified testing personnel in an appropriate environment
- Record-keeping according to OSHA regulations

**Points for Clinicians**

Ask about:

- Pain, fullness, ringing in ears
- Allergies, recent cold or sinus infection
- Medications (prescription & OTC) - some meds may cause tinnitus
- Family history, noise exposures, personal protective equipment (PPE) use

On exam, look for:

- Swelling, redness, drainage
- Scar tissue or wax plugs

*Remember to document findings*

For more information or to access a related webinar training go to www.agrisafe.org

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