

INDUSTRIAL NOISE EXPOSURE LIMITS

The Ontario Government is strengthening protection for industrial workers who are exposed to high levels of noise. Hearing loss, due to exposure to high levels of noise in the workplace, is a serious occupational illness. According to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), it resulted in an estimated \$100 million in compensation costs being paid between 1995 and 2004.

What is changing?

Currently, the Regulations for Industrial Establishments and for Offshore Oil and Gas Operators allow workers to be exposed to up to 90 decibels of noise for an eight-hour period.

The new regulations will lower the allowable limit to 85 decibels. It will also introduce a new time-weighted averaging method that will provide a more accurate way of determining the actual amount of noise a worker is exposed to. This is the first time these noise regulations have been significantly updated since they were introduced 30 years ago.

Who is covered by this?

All workplaces in Ontario covered by the Regulations for Industrial Establishments and the Regulations for Offshore Oil and Gas Operators will be covered by the new noise exposure limit. While other sectors, such as the mining and construction sectors, do not have set noise exposure limits, the Occupational Health and Safety Act still requires employers in these workplaces to take all reasonable precautions to protect the health and safety of these workers. This includes situations where they are exposed to high levels of noise.

Were consultations with interested parties held?

Consultations were held in the winter of 2005 - 2006. The noise consultation stakeholders included:

- Industry associations
- Labour organizations including relevant unions
- Health and safety partners including hearing associations
- Media – general and industry-specific
- MOL enforcement team members

The Canadian Hearing Association was also consulted and is supportive of the changes being made.

When does this new exposure limit come into effect?

The new exposure limit will come into effect on July 1, 2007. This will allow workplaces enough time to come into compliance with the new noise exposure limit.

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