HEARING PROTECTOR FIT-TESTING REQUIREMENT IN THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE – FACT SHEET

Defense Health Agency

INTRODUCTION

Significant updates to the Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 6055.12 "Hearing Conservation Program" are expected to be published in April 2023. The significant change is a new requirement for initial hearing protector fit-testing to be conducted for all DOD personnel who have documented noise exposure greater than or equal to 95 dBA 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA) and who are enrolled in a service hearing conservation program (HCP).

"Fit-testing is an effective, practical, and essential tool for preventing occupational hearing loss." (CDC, 2018)

"The most accurate procedure(s) for checking the fit of an earplug by measuring real-world attenuation." (CAOHC, 2014)

"Fit testing, which is a better indicator of individual performance, can be used to determine if the employee is not achieving adequate protection and remedy the problem via training or selection of an alternative hearing protection device." (AIHA, 2022).

WHAT IS HEARING PROTECTOR FIT TESTING?

Hearing protector fit testing is a procedure used to quantitively measure the amount of noise reduction a specific hearing protector is providing a user. Fit testing measures the personal attenuation rating (PAR) specific to each individual ear and hearing protector. The PAR is a real-world measurement of the overall attenuation the hearing protector provides the individual's ear.

WHY DO FIT TESTING?

- Identify workers at risk for noise-induced hearing loss due to inadequate hearing protector fit
- Properly select worker's hearing protectors to meet individual and environmental needs
- "Train-the-trainer" to better match hearing protectors to meet individual worker needs
- Train workers to properly fit and use hearing protectors
- Increase self-efficacy among workers who must wear hearing protectors
- Improve training outcomes by providing real-time feedback and documentation
- Motivate workers to consistently use hearing protectors in noisy environments
- Comply with federal regulations and service-specific policy requirements for fitting hearing protectors, providing training, and maintaining records
- Evaluate hearing conservation program effectiveness
- Reduce noise-induced hearing loss for those enrolled in DOD HCPs

WHO WILL RECEIVE FIT-TESTING AND WHEN?

(1) All DOD personnel enrolled in their service HCP and exposed at or above 95 dBA 8-hour TWA will have a hearing protector fit-test at the initial reference audiogram or prior to initial duty in hazardous noise areas or as soon as possible after employment begins.

(2) When a positive Significant Threshold Shift (STS) is identified on the periodic audiogram. A hearing protector fit test will be used to evaluate the hearing protection devices, confirm adequacy of fit, and PAR for the noise environment.

(3) When physical changes to a person's ear canal cause poor fit of assigned hearing protection devices.

(4) If the primary type of fitted hearing protection device is no longer available (e.g. employee switches from earplugs to ear muffs).

(5) When a single frequency 15 dB shift at 1000, 2000, 3000, and 4000 Hz occurs.

*Note: These are the minimum requirements for hearing protector fit-testing in the DOD—services may institute more stringent requirements for hearing protector fit-testing to better meet the needs of their respective HCP.

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