

Work environment – Rural safety

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Protecting your hearing >

This bulletin outlines some simple safety guidelines for those working in the rural industry and is one of a series on Rural Industry safety.

How many times have you heard or even said: “Oh, the noise doesn’t bother me, you get used to it”.

The truth is that you don’t get used to it. That seemingly increased tolerance that is gained is actually the result of deafness.

Deafness can be caused by:

- Exposure to noise above the recommended level.
- Exposure to constant noise - even below the recommended level.
- Sudden loud noises, eg gunshot.

The most important point to remember about noise is that the effect is cumulative so damage depends on your exposure and the length of that exposure.

**Some early warning signs of hearing loss include**

- Ringing in the ears after work.
- Having difficulty understanding a normal conversation.
- Turning the volume up to hear the radio or television when others appear to hear adequately.
- Failing to hear background noises such as a ringing telephone or doorbell.

Reduce noise at its source by

- Purchasing quieter machinery and equipment. Noise levels vary between brands and models.
- Modifying equipment to reduce noise.
- Keeping machinery well maintained

Reduce exposure to loud noise

Keep people away from noisy machinery by:

- Limiting the amount of time workers spend in a noisy environment.
- Using protective equipment when it is not possible to reduce noise at its source..

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Use protective equipment

- When noise exposure cannot be reduced then personal hearing protection is required. For example, hearing protection should be worn when using a tractor, when shooting or when using a chainsaw.
- Ear muffs should be tried on before buying to ensure comfort and that the seal around the ear is adequate. General purpose ear muffs for the farm will have a SLC 80 rating of at least 20 decibels. The 'SLC 80' figure, which stands for Sound Level Conversion, indicates in decibels the noise level reduction expected when the protectors are worn correctly. The higher the SLC 80 value, the better the protection.
- Ear plugs may be more comfortable for some farmers but must be inserted with clean hands. Re-useable plugs must be cleaned regularly. Cotton wool is not sufficient.
- Clean and maintain hearing protectors. Replace worn or damaged parts. Keep protectors near the area of noisy activity, for example, in the cab of the tractor.
- Earphones do not provide good protection from noise.

Remember

Once your hearing is gone, it is gone forever and hearing aids are of little help. They can make speech louder but cannot make it clearer.

PROTECT your hearing. Reduce the risks of hearing damage by reducing exposure to noise.

Do you:

- limit the amount of time spent in a noisy environment?
- buy quieter machinery and equipment?
- Wear ear muffs or ear plugs when using a tractor, chainsaw or constantly noisy machines, or when shooting.

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