

STANDARD PROCEDURE

CITY OF WILSON

PERSONNEL MANUAL

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SUBJECT	NUMBER	EFFECTIVE DATE	SUPERSEDES
Hearing Conservation Program	F-4	April 2018	Nov. 2015 Rev.

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Prepared By: Human Resources

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Approved By: Harry Tyson, Deputy City Manager

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**1.0 Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to provide all City of Wilson employees with a work environment free from excessive noise exposure levels by the use of either engineering design or Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). All work areas within each work area cannot always be designed to completely remove noise levels. Engineering controls will always be considered first when reducing noise levels. When engineering controls are not feasible, PPE will be utilized.

This policy will comply with OSHANC Occupational Noise Exposure Standard 29 CFR 1910.95.

**2.0 Scope**

This policy applies to all departments whose employees are exposed to noise levels that cannot be effectively reduced to 85 decibels over an 8 hour Time Weighted Average (TWA). It shall be the responsibility of each Department Head to ensure that the provisions of this policy are carried out within their respective departments.

Contractors performing work in restricted areas must comply with personal protective equipment requirements of this policy. It will be the responsibility of the contractor to provide personal protective equipment for their employees. The City of Wilson is not responsible for the hearing conservation program for contractors or their employees.

All visitors will be required to comply with the personal protective equipment requirements of this policy. If the visitor does not have hearing protection, complimentary earplugs may be furnished.

**3.0 Definitions**

- 3.1 **Audiogram:** A record of an employee’s hearing ability at various frequencies.
- 3.2 **Decibel (dB):** A measure of sound intensity.
- 3.3 **High Noise Environment:** An environment that contains a noise level reading of 85 or more decibels
- 3.4 **Standard Threshold Shift:** A change in hearing threshold, relative to the baseline audiogram, an average of 10 decibels or more at the 2000, 3000, or 4000 hertz (Hz) level in either ear.

**4.0 Procedures/Responsibilities**

**4.1 Administration**

- 4.1.1 The Safety and Risk Coordinator is responsible for ensuring:
  - 4.1.1.1 Initial and ongoing testing of employees is completed as required;
  - 4.1.1.2 Records are maintained per OSHA guidelines;
  - 4.1.1.3 Results are posted by areas and job descriptions;
  - 4.1.1.4 Records are audited periodically;
  - 4.1.1.5 Requirements of work areas/jobs are monitored and revised as applicable;
  - 4.1.1.6 Frequency of testing is monitored;
  - 4.1.1.7 Overall policy compliance.

**4.1.2 Division Heads/Supervisors are responsible for:**

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- 4.1.2.1 Requiring employees to wear hearing protection when in a high noise environment and/or exposed to an eight (8) hour time weighted average of 85 decibels or greater;
- 4.1.2.2 Requiring employees who have experienced a standard threshold hearing shift to wear hearing protection;
- 4.1.2.3 Continually monitoring work areas under their control for violations of this policy by employees, changes that increase work area noise levels, and engineering improvements to reduce noise levels, such as isolation pads, insulation or mufflers.

4.2 **Location/Work Area Monitoring**

- 4.2.1 Workplace must be completed:
  - 4.2.1.1 Initially or whenever there is any question of noise levels in an area;
  - 4.2.1.2 Whenever changes occur in production, process or controls that increase noise exposure in that particular area.
- 4.2.2 Hearing protection will be required of all employees upon being exposed to an area that has been determined at 85 dB noise level or higher.

4.3 **Employee Monitoring**

- 4.3.1 Employees will have audiometric testing performed through collaboration of Human Resources (Safety and Risk Coordinator) and the Employee Health and Wellness Center (EHWC).
- 4.3.2 Tests may be performed by the City of Wilson, a designated provided, or via a mobile audiometric testing van that meets the requirements of OSHANC 29 CFR 1910.95.
- 4.3.3 Employees exposed to noise will be offered an audiometric test annually. Testing will be at no cost to the employee.
- 4.3.4 Initial testing of each employee to establish the baseline audiogram will be performed within six (6) months of employment. Exception: if a mobile testing van is used to meet the audiometric testing obligation, the employer has one (1) year (after noise exposure at or above the action level) to obtain the baseline. New employees are expected to wear hearing protection during this time.
- 4.3.5 Testing to establish a baseline audiogram will be preceded at least fourteen (14) hours without exposure to workplace noise. Hearing protectors may be used as a substitute for this requirement.
- 4.3.6 The City will provide hearing protection at no cost to the employee.
- 4.3.7 Employees may select the type of hearing protectors they wish from a suitable selection offered.

4.4 **Evaluation of Audiograms**

- 4.4.1 Each employee’s annual audiogram will be compared to their baseline audiogram to determine if the test is valid and if a standard threshold shift has occurred.
- 4.4.2 A trained technician may make this comparison.

4.5 **Standard Threshold Shifts**

- 4.5.1 If the annual audiogram shows that an employee has suffered a standard threshold shift, the employer may obtain a retest within 30 days and consider the results of the retest as the annual audiogram.
- 4.5.2 The audiologist, otolaryngologist, or physician shall review problem audiograms and shall determine whether there is a need for further evaluation.

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- 4.5.3 If a comparison of the annual audiogram to the baseline audiogram indicates a standard threshold shift has occurred, the employee shall be informed of this fact in writing, within 21 days of determination.
- 4.5.4 If it is determined that the standard threshold shift is not work related or aggravated by occupational noise exposure, no further action is required.
  - 4.5.4.1 The employee may be informed of the need for an ontological examination if a medical pathology of the ear that is unrelated to the use of hearing protection is suspected.
- 4.5.5 If it is determined that the standard threshold shift is work related or aggravated by occupational noise exposure:
  - 4.5.5.1 Employees not using hearing protection shall be fitted with hearing protectors, trained in their use and required to use them.
  - 4.5.5.2 Employees already using hearing protectors shall be refitted and retrained in the use of hearing protectors and provided with hearing protectors offering greater noise attenuation if necessary.
  - 4.5.5.3 Employees shall be referred for a clinical audiological evaluation or an ontological examination, as appropriate, if additional testing is necessary or if the employer suspects that a medical pathology of the ear is caused or aggravated by wearing of hearing protectors.

**5.0 Administrative Guidelines**

**5.1 Training**

- 5.1.1 Department Heads and Human Resources will ensure that affected employees are annually trained on the following:
  - 5.1.1.1 The effects of noise on hearing
  - 5.1.1.2 The purpose, advantages/disadvantages, and attenuation characteristics of various types of hearing protectors
  - 5.1.1.3 The selection, fitting and care of hearing protectors
  - 5.1.1.4 The purpose and procedures of audiometric testing
- 5.1.2 Upon request, employees will be provided with literature/informational material outlining the purpose of hearing conservation.
- 5.1.3 Management will post warning signs in affected areas, along with a copy of the current OSHA standard for hearing conservation.

**5.2 Recordkeeping**

- 5.2.1 The Safety and Risk Coordinator will keep noise exposure measurement records for two (2) years, or when the measurements are taken, if sooner.
- 5.2.2 Records of audiometric test results will be maintained and retained by the EHWC for the duration of the affected employee's employment.
- 5.2.3 Audiometric test records will include, at a minimum, the date the test was performed, the examiner's name, the date of acoustic or exhaustive calibration of the testing equipment, measurement of the background sound pressure levels in the audiometric test booth and the employee's most recent noise exposure measurement. Comparable data will be provided by the mobile van upon request, if applicable.