

Change highlights: Noise exposure – Part 16 in the OHS Code

OHS information for work site parties and service providers

This bulletin introduces changes in Noise – Part 16 of the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Code.

IMPORTANT

This is an overview of updates effective March 31, 2023. Consult the law directly to make sure you comply with all applicable requirements.

KEY INFORMATION

- Part 16 covers requirements intended to protect workers from exposure to occupational noise hazards.
- Key changes include:
 - Revising wording to improve clarity.
 - Updates to technical standards and terminology to reflect current technology.
 - A reduced action limit for conducting a noise exposure assessment.
 - A new requirement for fit testing of hearing protection.
 - Clarification of the competency of persons conducting noise assessments.

Noise exposure assessment

The threshold for conducting a noise exposure assessment is reduced from 85 decibels (dBA) to 82 dBA to ensure noise is assessed before the occupational exposure limit is exceeded. The noise exposure assessment must be conducted in accordance with the updated CSA Standard Z107.56-18, *Measurement of noise exposure*.

The threshold level of a noise dosimeter used to conduct an assessment has been changed to align with the referenced CSA standard for noise assessments. The technical standards that sound level meters, integrating sound level meters and dosimeters must meet have been updated to the most current versions.

Established competency requirements for the person conducting the noise exposure assessment are now specified. The person conducting the assessment must be:

- Trained in conducting noise exposure assessments.

- Trained in the calibration, operation, and maintenance of the equipment used in conducting noise exposure measurements.
- Able to demonstrate an understanding of the method used for measurement.

Results recorded

Revised wording clarifies that employers must ensure the noise exposure assessment includes a record of the tasks carried out by the worker whose noise exposure is being evaluated.

Employers must also retain records for at least three years from the date of the assessment. This now aligns with chemical exposure assessment record retention timelines. Previously, employers were required to keep these records for as long as they operated in Alberta.

Noise management program

The elements required in a noise management program have been streamlined and updated to remove duplication and improve clarity. The new wording more closely aligns with the elements in the CSA Standard Z1007-16, *Hearing Loss Prevention Program Management* as an industry best practice for setting up programs to prevent hearing loss.

The revised requirement clarifies that the entire noise management program must be reviewed annually, not just elements of it.

Fit testing of hearing protection

A new requirement has been added for employers to ensure workers are fit tested for the hearing protection devices they use and wear. Fit testing of the devices must meet the updated CSA Standard Z94.2-14 (R2019), *Hearing Protection Devices – Performance, Selection, Care, and Use*.

This change is intended to prevent noise induced hearing loss. The effectiveness of hearing protection is greatly reduced if the equipment does not fit correctly or is not inserted or worn correctly.

Fit testing of hearing protection can be conducted either quantitatively or qualitatively. Quantitative methods are the preferred standard, but these require specialized equipment. Qualitative methods are simpler to perform and rely on the worker's sense of hearing. See the callout box below for suggested qualitative methods to check the fit of foam ear plugs and ear muffs.

TIPS TO CHECK THE FIT OF FOAM EAR PLUGS

- Use your fingertips to feel if the ear plugs are fully inserted into the ear canal, use a mirror to check, or have a coworker visually confirm.
- Cup hands tightly over your ears. If sounds are much more muffled with your hands in place, the earplugs may not be sealing properly.
- Talk out loud. Your voice should sound hollow, as if you are talking in a barrel.
- Listen for noises around you. Noises should not be as loud as they were before inserting the ear plugs.

TIPS TO CHECK THE FIT OF EAR MUFFS

- Read the manufacturer's instructions on how to don the ear muffs.
- Make sure the ear muffs cover the whole ear, and do not have anything in between that prevents a good seal between the ear muff and the ear (for example, prescription eyewear).
- Listen for noises around you. Noises should sound muffled and not be as loud as they were before putting on the ear muffs.

Consulting audiologists and physicians

Consulting audiologists and physicians who receive test results where a significant threshold shift has been confirmed must provide aggregated test result data to the employer at least once per year. They must also advise the employer of any concerns that, in their opinion, are related to noise management at a work site or area. The previous wording was unclear as to what information had to be provided, these changes are intended to improve clarity.

The employer must retain this information for at least two years.

Definitions

A definition for "significant threshold shift" has been added to be consistent with the referenced CSA Standard Z107.6:16 (R2020), *Audiometric testing for use in hearing loss prevention programs*. It is defined as a change in hearing threshold relative to a reference audiometric test that indicates one of the following:

- An average shift of greater than or equal to 10 dB (30 dB or more combined) in either ear at 2,000, 3,000, and 4,000 Hz.
- A shift of greater than or equal to 15 dB at 3,000 or 4,000 Hz.
- The definition of "audiometric technician" has been reworded to improve clarity.
- The definition of "audiometer" has been updated to align with the referenced standard for audiometers.

Audiometric testing

Wording has been clarified to ensure workers who are or may be exposed to excess noise at the work site must be provided with audiometric tests. These audiometric tests will still need to be paid for by the employer. The time workers take to get tested will still be credited as work time.

Service providers

Audiometric technicians

Prescriptive requirements for audiometric technician work and testing methods have been replaced by a requirement for audiometers to meet ANSI/ASA S3.6-2018, *Specification for Audiometers* and for the audiometric testing to be done in accordance with CSA Standard Z107.6:16 (R2020), *Audiometric testing for use in hearing loss prevention programs*.

Contact us

OHS Contact Centre

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Edmonton and surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hard of hearing (TTY)

- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

Notify OHS of health and safety concerns

alberta.ca/file-complaint-online.aspx

Call the OHS Contact Centre if you have concerns that involve immediate danger to a person on a work site.

Report a workplace incident to OHS

alberta.ca/ohs-complaints-incidents.aspx

Website

alberta.ca/ohs

Get copies of the OHS Act, Regulation and Code

Alberta King's Printer

alberta.ca/alberta-kings-printer.aspx

OHS

alberta.ca/ohs-act-regulation-code.aspx

For more information

CSA Standards (free account required)

community.csagroup.org/login.jspa

OHS Code review

alberta.ca/ohs-code-review.aspx

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