



DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING A HEARING CONSERVATION CODE OF PRACTICE



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GUIDELINE INTRODUCTION

This guideline supports New Brunswick employers in developing and maintaining a workplace-specific Hearing Conservation Code of Practice.

Exposure to excessive noise can lead to temporary or permanent hearing loss and is a significant occupational hazard. A Code of Practice is required when noise exposure in a work area exceeds the limits outlined in section 30 of General Regulation 91-191.



As a New Brunswick employer, you're responsible to protect your employees from hazardous noise levels in the workplace.

WHAT IS NOISE EXPOSURE?

Noise exposure is the combination of the noise levels experienced in a certain environment and the time spent in that environment. A worker's total exposure is the cumulation of all noise exposures throughout the shift.

INTERPRETING THE NOISE EXPOSURE TABLE

This table outlines the maximum allowable daily exposure durations for various sound levels, measured in A-weighted decibels (dBA), as required by section 30 in the General Regulation 91-191. As sound levels increase, the permissible exposure time decreases to reduce the risk of hearing damage.

Sound Level		Duration per day	
 dBA		 Hours	
80		24	
82		16	
85		8	
88		4	
91		2	
94		1	
97		1/2	
100		1/4	

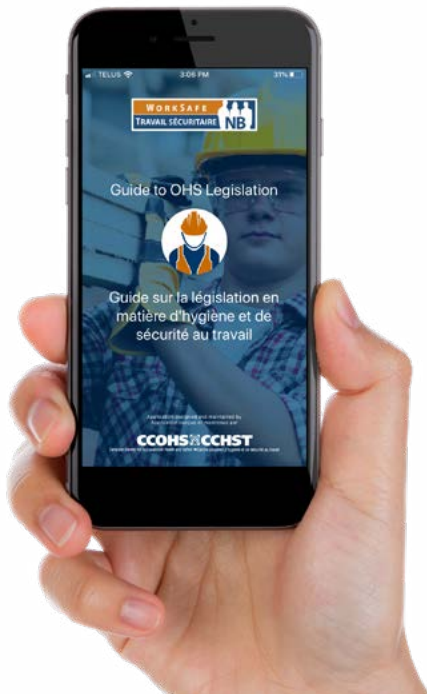


KEY POINTS:

- » **dBA** represents sound levels adjusted to reflect human hearing sensitivity.
- » Exposure beyond these limits requires implementation of noise control measures and/or hearing protection. It also requires development of a Hearing Conservation Code of Practice.
- » Employers must assess workplace noise levels and ensure compliance with these threshold limits to prevent occupational hearing loss.

The Hearing Conservation Code of Practice must be developed according to the requirements in General Regulation 91-191 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. The regulation above also references the following CSA Standards:

- » **Z107.56-06 (R2011)** *Procedures for the measurement of occupational noise exposure*
- » **Z-107.6:16 (R2020)** *Audiometric testing for use in hearing loss prevention programs*
- » **Z94.2-14 (R2019)** *Hearing protection devices – Performance, selection, care, and use*



These standards can be referenced for free by creating an account on the CSA Communities website. **For detailed steps on accessing CSA Standards see:**

worksafenb.ca/education-and-training/online-access-to-csa-standards/









See worksafenb.ca for additional resources or support. The NB OHS Guide App is also available for quick, mobile access to OHS legislation.



HEARING CONSERVATION CODE OF PRACTICE

The following elements must be included in a Hearing Conservation Code of Practice:

These elements must be tailored to the specific conditions of the workplace and comply with CSA standards referenced in the regulation. The Hearing Conservation Code of Practice must be developed in consultation with the joint health and safety committee (JHSC), health and safety representative or with employees if there is no committee or representative.

-  **1 Noise levels to** which employees will be exposed.
-  **2 Identification of the workplace or work area** where the Code applies.
-  **3 Posting of signage** indicating areas where hearing protection is required.
-  **4 Implementation of noise control measures**, following the hierarchy of controls.
-  **5 Provisions for the use of hearing protection devices**, specifying types and required areas.
-  **6 Audiometric testing program**, including:
 - Testing schedule (baseline and follow-up)
 - Record-keeping requirements
-  **7 Education and training** for workers on:
 - Noise hazards
 - Proper use and care of hearing protection
 - Health effects of noise exposure
-  **8 Review and update procedures** for the Code of Practice to ensure ongoing effectiveness and compliance.



MEASURING NOISE LEVELS IN THE WORKPLACE

New Brunswick employers are responsible to measure noise levels if either employer or employee believe that noise levels may possibly exceed 80 dBA. A noise survey must be conducted by a competent person in accordance with CSA Standard Z107.56-06 (R2011), *Procedures for the measurement of occupational noise exposure*, or a standard offering equivalent or better protection.

Noise measurements can be performed with a Sound Level Meter (SLM), Integrating Sound Level Meter (ISLM) or personal dosimeter. Sound level meters are used to determine noise levels in the workplace, or in specific locations. Personal dosimeters measure noise exposure levels experienced by a particular worker.

The table below summarizes the differences between sound level meters, integrating sound level meters, and personal dosimeters.

Instrument	When to use	Purpose	Notes
Sound Level Meter (SLM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spot-checking noise levels in specific areas Identifying noisy equipment Useful for consistent noise sources with limited fluctuation 	Measures instantaneous sound pressure levels at a specific location and time	Requires multiple readings to estimate exposure over time
Integrating Sound Level Meter (ISLM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessing average noise levels over time Evaluating Fluctuating noise environments 	Measures Leq (Equivalent Continuous Sound Level) over a period of time, ideal for variable noise	Preferred for compliance with CSA Z107.56-06 and workplace assessments
Personal dosimeter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measuring individual worker exposure throughout a shift Mobile workers or workers in fluctuating noise environments 	Worn by workers to record personal exposure to noise during work activities	Best for capturing real-world exposure over time

NOISE LEVELS

Noise levels are likely hazardous if a person must raise their voice to speak with someone who is an arm's length away.



WHAT DOES COMPETENT MEAN?

In General Regulation 91-191, **competent** means:

(a) qualified, because of such factors as knowledge, training and experience, to do assigned work in a manner that will ensure the health and safety of persons,

(b) knowledgeable about the provisions of the Act and the regulations that apply to the assigned work, and

(c) knowledgeable about potential or actual danger to health or safety connected with the assigned work.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

- » CSA **Z107.56-06 (R2011)** recommends using **Leq,t** and **Lex,T** for assessing occupational noise exposure, which are best captured using ISLMs or dosimeters.
- » Dosimeters are especially useful when workers move between different noise zones or perform tasks with varying noise levels.
- » SLMs are useful for initial surveys or mapping noise levels in fixed locations.

Noise levels must be measured in decibels (dBA) using an A-weighted filter, which adjusts sound measurements to reflect the sensitivity of the human ear.



WHAT IS LEQ,T?

Leq,t stands for **Equivalent Continuous Sound Level over time (t)**. It's a metric used in occupational noise assessments to represent the **average sound energy over a specified time period**, expressed in decibels (dBA).

Noise levels fluctuate throughout a work shift. Instead of using peak or instantaneous readings, **Leq,t** calculates a single value that reflects the **total energy of all noise during that time**, as if it were at a constant level.

WHAT IS LEX,T?

Lex,T is the **normalized equivalent continuous sound level over a reference time period (usually 8 hours)**.

- ♦ It adjusts the measured noise exposure to a standard duration, allowing comparison across shifts of different lengths.
- ♦ Expressed in **dBA**, it represents the cumulative energy of all noise exposures during the shift, normalized to 8 hours.

NOISE MAPPING IN THE WORKPLACE

Noise mapping is a valuable tool for visualizing sound levels across different areas of a workplace. It helps to identify zones with hazardous noise exposure and supports decisions on control measures and hearing protection requirements.

STEPS TO CONDUCT NOISE MAPPING:

1 PLANNING THE SURVEY

- » Review workplace layout and identify areas with machinery or processes likely to generate noise.
- » Determine the type of noise (continuous, intermittent, impulse) and expected variability.
- » Select appropriate instruments: **Sound Level Meter (SLM)** for spot checks, **Integrating Sound Level Meter (ISLM)** for average levels.

2 INSTRUMENT SETUP

- » Calibrate the instrument according to manufacturer instructions.
- » Set the response rate to “slow” for general workplace measurements.
- » Ensure the **A-weighting filter** is activated to reflect human hearing sensitivity.

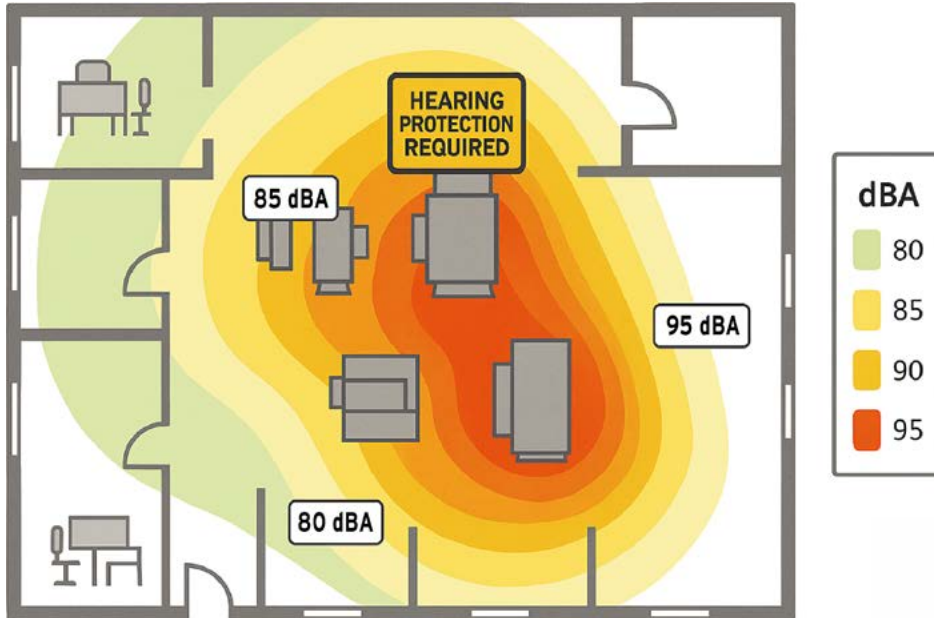
3 MEASUREMENT PROCEDURE

- » Take readings at ear height in multiple locations across the area.
- » Record the exact location and time of each measurement.
- » For dynamic environments, take repeated measurements at different times or use ISLMs to capture fluctuating levels.
- » Ensure to capture “worst case” conditions during measurements or include contingencies/comments. If multiple noise sources can affect noise levels at a measurement location, all sources should operate while measurements are taken.



4 DATA VISUALIZATION

- » Plot measured sound levels on a floor plan or site map.
- » Use colour-coded contours to represent different noise intensities (such as green for safe zones, red for hazardous zones).
- » Highlight areas exceeding regulatory limits (for example, >85 dBA for 8 hours).



ANALYSIS AND ACTION

- » Compare mapped data against exposure limits in General Regulation 91-191. Consider the time workers spend in the different noise environments (if applicable). Remember that an individual's noise exposure is cumulative.
- » Identify areas requiring noise controls or mandatory hearing protection.
- » Share results with the JHSC or workplace representative.

BEST PRACTICES

- » Use **ISLMs** for more accurate exposure data, especially in variable noise environments.
- » Repeat mapping periodically or when significant changes occur in equipment or layout.
- » Consider using noise mapping software for complex environments or large facilities.



STEPS TO CONDUCT DOSIMETER MEASUREMENTS:

1 PLANNING THE SURVEY

- » Identify Similar Exposure Groups (SEGs) based on job tasks, equipment used, and work areas.
- » Select a representative day that reflects typical noise exposure for the SEG. Avoid unusual conditions unless assessing worst-case scenarios.
- » Determine the number of workers to sample for accurate representation.

2 INSTRUMENT SETUP

- » Calibrate the dosimeter according to manufacturer instructions before and after use.
- » Set the dosimeter to comply with CSA Standard Z107.56-06:
 - Exchange rate: 3 dB
 - Criterion level: 85 dBA
 - Threshold: 80 dBA
- » Ensure the A-weighting filter is activated, and the time-weighting is set to “slow.”
- » Configure the device to log data at appropriate intervals for detailed analysis.

3 MEASUREMENT PROCEDURE

- » Attach the dosimeter microphone near the worker’s ear (within 10–15 cm) without obstructing normal movement.
- » Start measurements at the beginning of the shift and continue until the end of the shift. If the full shift cannot be measured, adjust results to an 8-hour $L_{ex,T}$ using CSA formulas.
- » **Record contextual details:**
 - Worker’s tasks and locations throughout the shift
 - Break times and any unusual noise events
 - Environmental conditions that may affect readings

4 DATA ANALYSIS

- » Download and review logged data for accuracy.
- » Normalize exposure to an 8-hour reference period ($L_{ex,T}$) for compliance assessment.
- » Compare results against regulatory limits and identify SEGs exceeding permissible exposure.

BEST PRACTICES

- » Use multiple sampling days for SEGs with variable tasks.
- » Document all settings, calibration checks and observations in a log.
- » Consider seasonal variations and changes in equipment or processes.
- » Share findings with the JHSC or workplace representative for corrective action planning.



POSTING OF SIGNAGE

Signage plays a critical role in communicating noise hazards and ensuring compliance with hearing protection requirements. In New Brunswick, employers are legally obligated to post warning signs in areas where noise levels exceed safe exposure limits.

Under General Regulation 91-191, signage must be posted in any workplace area where noise levels **exceed 85 dBA**. These signs serve to alert workers of the hazard and indicate the mandatory use of hearing protection.

SIGNS MUST CLEARLY DISPLAY:

- » The range of noise levels measured in the area (“Noise Levels: 85–95 dBA”).
- » A warning indicating the presence of a noise hazard (“Hearing Protection Required”).

Signs must be conspicuously posted at all entrances to designated high-noise zones so that no worker can enter without seeing the warning. They should be easily visible and legible to all workers entering the area. Employers are responsible for ensuring that workers understand the meaning of the signage and the required precautions, including the mandatory use of hearing protection in posted areas.

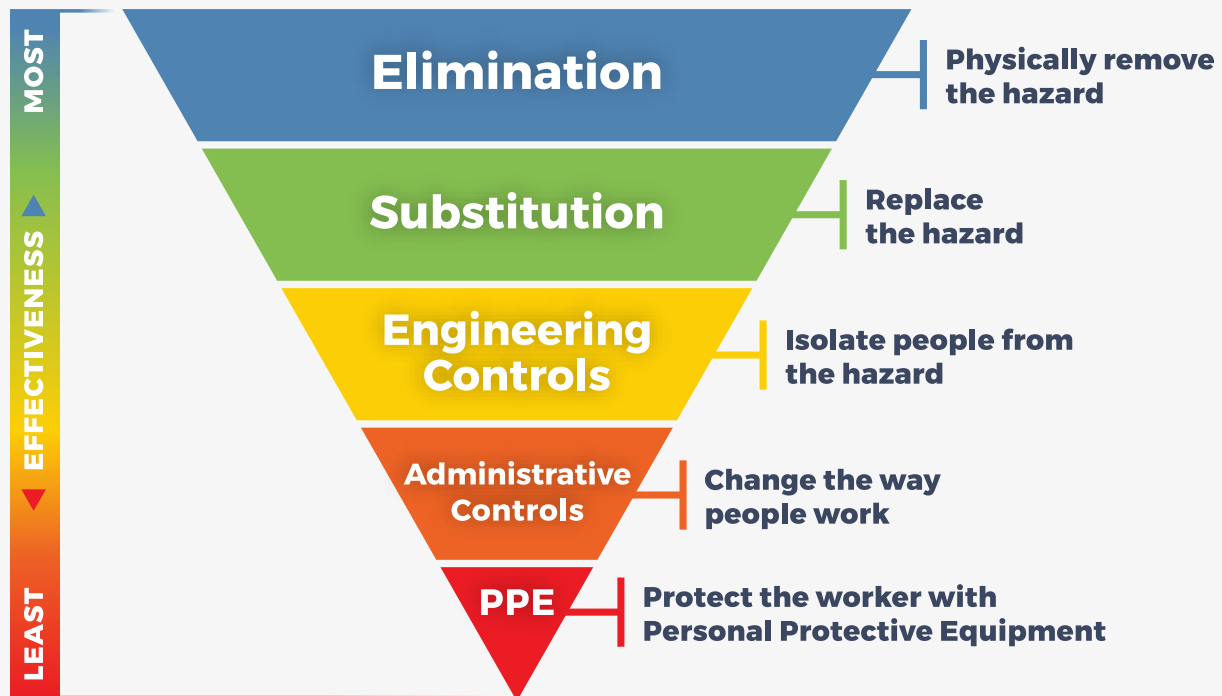
To maintain effectiveness, signage should be made from durable, weather-resistant materials, particularly for outdoor or industrial environments, and include pictograms or symbols to improve comprehension in multilingual workplaces.

Regular inspection and maintenance are essential to ensure visibility and accuracy. These signage requirements must be documented in the workplace’s Hearing Conservation Code of Practice, which should include a list of designated high-noise areas, procedures for updating signage when noise levels or layouts change, and clear responsibilities for signage maintenance and worker communication.



IMPLEMENTATION OF NOISE CONTROL MEASURES

To effectively reduce hazardous noise exposure in the workplace, control measures should be implemented following the **Hierarchy of Controls**, from most effective to least effective:



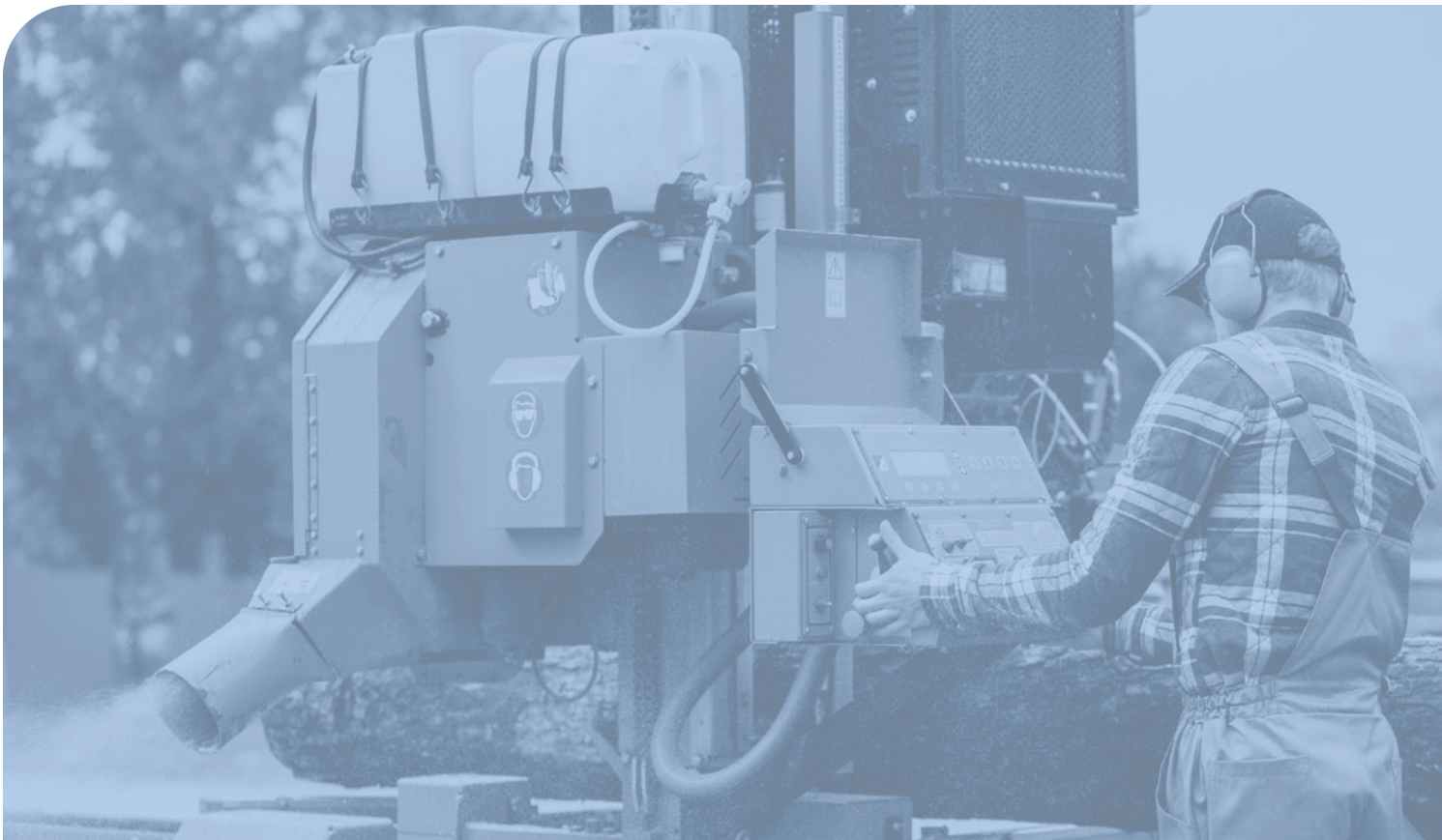
Elimination is the most effective method for controlling noise hazards because it involves physically removing the source of the noise. This can be achieved by discontinuing the use of noisy equipment or processes altogether or by relocating noisy operations to areas away from workers. While elimination provides the highest level of protection, it is often the least feasible option due to operational requirements and practical constraints.

Substitution involves replacing the noise source with a quieter alternative. This can include using machinery or tools designed to operate at lower noise levels or replacing pneumatic tools with electric ones that generate less noise. When feasible and properly implemented, substitution is considered a highly effective method for reducing workplace noise exposure.



Engineering controls are designed to isolate people from noise hazards or reduce noise at its source. Common examples include installing sound barriers or acoustic enclosures around noisy equipment, using vibration-dampening mounts or silencers to minimize mechanical noise, and installing sound dampening materials. These measures are considered effective and sustainable solutions for controlling workplace noise. In fact, Section 31 of General Regulation 91-191 requires the installation of engineering controls to limit noise exposures whenever practical.

Administrative controls involve changing the way work is performed to reduce noise exposure. These measures include rotating workers to limit the time spent in noisy areas, scheduling noisy tasks when fewer workers are present, posting signage to warn of high-noise zones and maintaining equipment regularly to prevent excessive noise caused by wear and tear. While administrative controls can help reduce exposure, they are less effective than elimination or engineering controls because they rely on consistent implementation and worker compliance.



HEARING PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

Hearing PPE is considered the least effective means of controlling noise exposure because of the potential for human error, inconsistent use or improper fit.

Hearing protection must meet the requirements of CSA Standard Z94.2-14 (R2019), *Hearing protection devices – Performance, selection, care, and use* or a standard offering equivalent or better protection. Employers in New Brunswick are required to provide adequate hearing protective equipment so the exposure of noise to an employee is kept within the acceptable limits.

Individual fit is an important factor in selecting the proper hearing PPE. Fit testing is recommended to ensure optimal protection. Work environments should be considered in the selection of PPE as well as compatibility with other safety gear. Well-fitting, comfortable PPE is much more likely to be worn over an entire shift.

WHAT IS ATTENUATION?

Attenuation refers to the reduction in the intensity of sound as it passes through a material or device. For hearing protection, attenuation is the amount of noise reduction provided by earplugs, earmuffs or other protective equipment. It's usually expressed in decibels (dB).




Maintaining hearing protection devices is essential to ensure they provide consistent and effective noise **attenuation**. Proper care begins with regular cleaning to remove dirt, sweat and contaminants that can compromise the seal and comfort of earplugs or earmuffs. Reusable devices, such as pre-molded or custom earplugs, should be washed with mild soap and water and thoroughly dried before reuse, while disposable foam plugs should be replaced frequently to maintain hygiene and performance. Earmuffs require inspection of cushions and headbands for wear or damage, as deteriorated parts can reduce their protective capability. Storage in a clean dry container away from extreme temperatures and chemicals helps prevent material degradation. Additionally, workers must be trained on correct handling and maintenance practices, as improper care can significantly reduce the noise attenuation and overall effectiveness of the device.



NOISE REDUCTION RATING (NRR)

NRR is expressed in decibels (dB) and represents the amount of sound attenuation a hearing protection device can provide under ideal laboratory conditions. However, real-world attenuation is typically lower due to improper fit, inconsistent use or environmental factors. To account for these factors, derating calculations must be used. See Table 2 from CSA Standard Z94.2-14 (R2019) *Hearing protection devices – Performance, selection, care, and use* and sample calculations below:

DERATING CALCULATIONS:

Device type	% of NRR achieved	Calculation
Earplugs 	50%	$Leq - [NRR(0.5) - 3] = XX \text{ dBA}$
Earmuffs 	70%	$Leq - [NRR(0.7) - 3] = XX \text{ dBA}$
Dual Protection 	65%	$Leq - [(NRR + 5)(0.65) - 3] = XX \text{ dBA}$

NOTES ON DERATING CALCULATIONS

Because NRR are provided in dBC, while measurement results are provided in dBA, the calculations reduce the derated NRR by 3 dB. The NRR that is used for the dual-protection calculations is the higher of the individual NRRs of the two devices.

EXAMPLE 1:







The NRR is applied to an A-weighted sound level, so the NRR shall be reduced by 3 dB after the derating is applied. For a measured A-weighted Leq of 95 dBA and an earmuff with an NRR of 26, the predicted A-weighted effective Leq is computed as follows:

$$95 \text{ dBA} - [26(0.7) - 3] = 95 - [18.2 - 3] = 79.8 \text{ dBA, which rounds to 80 dBA.}$$

EXAMPLE 2 – FOR DUAL PROTECTION:

For a measured A-weighted Leq of 105 dBA, and using a combination of an earplug with an NRR of 33 dB and an earmuff with an NRR of 26 dB, the calculation proceeds as follows:

$$105 \text{ dBA} - [(33 + 5)(0.65) - 3] = 105 - [24.7 - 3] = 83.3 \text{ dBA, which rounds to 83 dBA.}$$

Hearing Protection	Typical NRR	PROS	CONS
Foam earplugs 	29–33 dBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inexpensive and widely available • Highest NRR available • Good for long-term use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires proper insertion with high potential for improper use • Can be uncomfortable for extended wear
Pre-molded earplugs 	20–25 dBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reusable and durable • Easier to insert than foam plugs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not fit all ear canals • Lower NRR than foam plugs
Custom-molded earplugs 	26–28 dBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent fit and comfort • Long-lasting and reusable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive • Requires professional fitting • Fit may change over time
Earmuffs 	20–31 dBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to use • Good for intermittent noise exposure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulky • May interfere with other PPE • Less effective with glasses or long hair
Electronic earmuffs 	22–30 dBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows communication • Adjustable amplification • Good for variable environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive • Requires batteries or charging
Canal caps 	15–20 dBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convenient for intermittent use • Easy to insert and remove 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower NRR • May not seal well for all users

FIELD ATTENUATION ESTIMATION SYSTEMS (FAES)

Field Attenuation Estimation Systems (FAES) are highlighted in CSA Standard Z94.2-14 as a best practice for selecting hearing protection. They measure the actual attenuation achieved by an individual in real-world conditions.

Unlike laboratory-based NRRs, which often overestimate protection and require derating formulas, FAES uses fit-testing methods to calculate a Personal Attenuation Rating (PAR) for each worker. This approach accounts for factors like fit, user technique, and compatibility with other PPE, providing a more accurate and personalized measure of protection.

CSA and other authorities, including the National Institution for Safety and Health (NIOSH), recommend FAES because it improves compliance and training outcomes. Workers receive immediate feedback on whether their hearing protection is effective, enabling adjustments and retraining if necessary. FAES reduces the risk of under-protection, which can lead to hearing loss and overprotection, which can impair situational awareness. By confirming that each worker's exposure meets regulatory limits, FAES ensures reliability and accountability, making it the preferred method over traditional NRR-based selection in modern hearing conservation programs.



AUDIOMETRIC TESTING PROGRAM

Audiometric testing is mandatory when workers are **exposed to noise levels exceeding the permissible exposure limits** (not considering any hearing protective devices the workers are wearing), as outlined in General Regulation 91-191. Employers must identify exposed workers through a noise assessment, including seasonal and temporary workers.

TESTING SCHEDULE

» **Baseline test:** Must be conducted as soon as possible, but **no later than six months** after a worker begins employment or changes duties that increase noise exposure.

» **Follow-up tests:** Required at least once every **24 months** after the baseline test if the worker remains exposed.

Audiometric testing can be conducted on-site, at an audiologist facility or at off-site mobile testing units. The testing area must meet maximum permissible ambient noise levels to prevent masking of test tones. All testing procedures must comply with CSA Standard Z107.6:16 (R2020) or an equivalent standard to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Audiometric testing may only be conducted by a registered audiologist who is a member of the New Brunswick Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (NBASLPA), or by an individual who has successfully completed a training course specified in clause 6 of CSA Standard Z107.6:16 (R2020) *Audiometric testing for use in hearing loss prevention programs*, or an equivalent standard that offers equal or better protection.

To find an audiologist in your area, visit:

worksafenb.ca/safety-topics/audiometric-testing-in-new-brunswick-workplaces/

The test procedure is conducted in a sound-treated booth or a quiet room to ensure accurate results. During the test, workers wear headphones or inserts and respond to tones presented at various frequencies. The results are recorded on an audiogram and compared over time to detect early signs of hearing loss.

After audiometric testing, workers must receive counseling on their hearing status and be instructed on the proper use and care of hearing protection. If abnormal results are identified, medical follow-up may be required to address potential hearing issues.

Employers must retain all audiometric test results for the duration of employment. They need to be kept confidential, except to a WorkSafeNB health and safety officer upon request. Records do not need to be kept on site if they can be produced when requested.

Audiometers must meet the specifications outlined in CSA Standard Z107.6:16 (R2020). To ensure accuracy and reliability, all equipment must be calibrated bi-annually.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Employers must ensure that all workers exposed to hazardous noise levels receive instruction and training on the hazards of excessive noise exposure.

This includes understanding both short-term and long-term health effects, such as temporary threshold shifts and permanent hearing loss. Workers should also learn about the different types of noise—continuous, intermittent and impulse—and how each affects hearing.

Training must cover noise control measures, including an explanation of engineering and administrative controls in place. Emphasis should be placed on the importance of reducing noise at the source and minimizing exposure time, whenever possible.

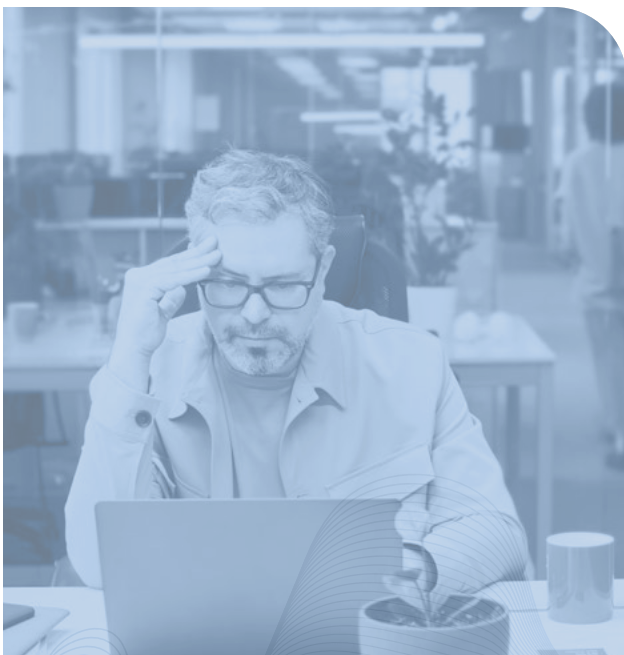
Workers should receive detailed instruction on hearing PPE. This includes how to select, fit, use, maintain and store hearing protection devices such as earplugs and earmuffs. They must also understand the meaning of NRR and how real-world protection may differ from laboratory-tested values. Fit testing and consistent use of PPE are critical components of effective hearing protection.

Employers must maintain records of:

- ◆ **Training sessions** provided to employees.
- ◆ **Noise level** measurements.
- ◆ **Hearing test results**, which must be kept confidential and only shared with written employee consent or as required by law.

Signage and hazard communication are also essential. Areas where noise levels exceed 85 dBA must be clearly marked with signs indicating the range of noise levels measured and a warning of the noise hazard. Workers must be made aware of these zones and the precautions required when entering them.

Employees have responsibilities under the hearing conservation program. They must wear hearing protection when required and know how to properly use and care for their hearing protectors. Supervisors play a critical role in hazard communication and compliance. They must acquaint workers with the hazards and control measures related to their tasks, provide the necessary instruction to ensure health and safety and enforce compliance with the company's safety rules and hearing conservation program.



PROGRAM REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

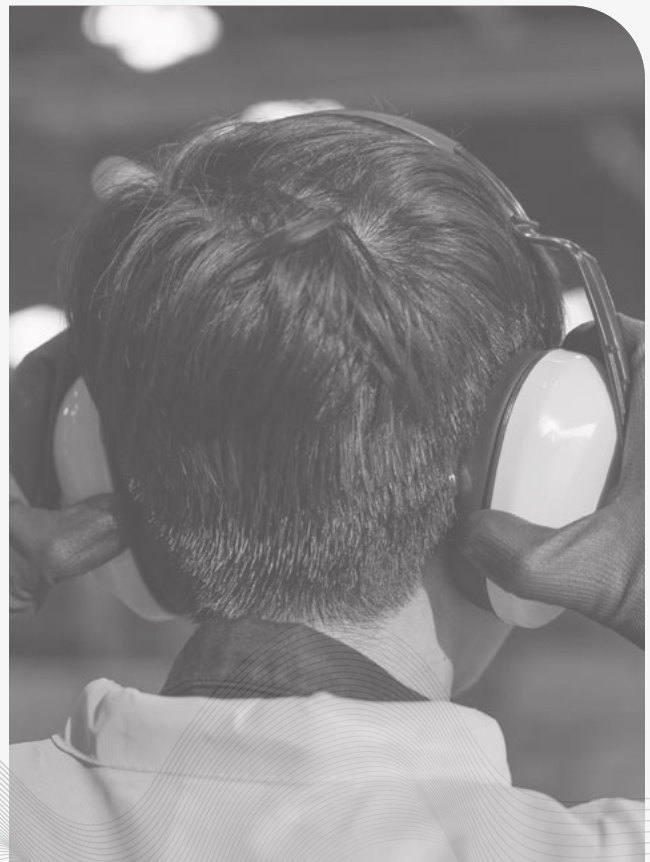
A Hearing Conservation Code of Practice must be reviewed regularly to ensure it remains effective, up to date, and compliant with regulatory requirements. The review process must be systematic and thorough and include the JHSC, if any, a health and safety representative, if any, or if there is no committee or representative, employees.

The frequency of review must include a formal review at least annually. Additional reviews are required after any significant changes in workplace layout, equipment or processes that may affect noise exposure. Reviews should also occur following any incidents of hearing loss or non-compliance, and whenever new regulations or standards are introduced.

During the review, several key areas must be examined. Noise exposure assessments should be checked to ensure measurements are current and accurately reflect actual working conditions. The effectiveness of noise controls must be evaluated to confirm that engineering and administrative controls are reducing exposure as intended. The use and condition of hearing protection should also be verified to ensure PPE is appropriate, properly used and maintained. Audiometric testing records must be reviewed to confirm that testing is up to date and results are being monitored for trends or concerns. Training and education programs should be assessed to ensure all affected workers have received proper instruction and refreshers. Additionally, signage and hazard communication must be verified to confirm that high-noise areas are clearly marked, and workers are aware of the risks and required precautions.

Documentation is an essential part of the review process. Employers must maintain records of each program review, including the date of review, participants involved, findings and recommendations, actions taken and follow-up timelines.

Finally, continuous improvement should be a core objective of the review process. Findings should be used to update the Code of Practice, and the JHSC or worker representatives should be engaged to incorporate feedback and promote accountability.





MAKING
New Brunswick
THE SAFEST
PLACE
TO **WORK**

