

Health and Safety Committee

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A newsletter for and about safety at UW Oshkosh

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“What’s OSHA Got To Do With It?”

By Evan Schwalbe

Why was OSHA Created?

Congress enacted the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 which created the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Its mission is to help employers and employees reduce on the job injuries, illnesses and deaths. OSHA directs national compliance initiatives in occupational safety and health. Through the methods described below, OSHA helps business protect their workers and reduce the number of workplace deaths, injuries and illnesses. When employees stay safe and healthy, companies can reduce workers’ compensation insurance costs and medical expenses, decreased payout for return-to-work programs, reduce faulty products, and lower costs for job accommodations for injured workers.

Since 1970, workplace deaths have been cut by more than 60 percent and occupational injuries and illnesses have declined 40 percent. In addition OSHA has conducted almost 39,000 inspections & issued over 85,000 citations for safety violations, and has assisted businesses with its Consultation Program by making over 31,000 visits to employers.

What does OSHA do?

OSHA employs the following strategies to help employers and employees reduce injuries, illnesses, and deaths on the job:

- Enforcement – making sure OSHA Regulations are followed
 - Assistance – outreach & training to employers and employees
- OSHA promotes workplace safety and health by:
- Implementing new (or improved) safety and health management systems.
 - Completing worksite inspections.
 - Establishing specific rights and responsibilities of employees and employers.
 - Establishing recordkeeping and reporting requirements for employers.
 - Developing training programs for occupational safety and health personnel.
 - Partnering with states that operate their own occupational safety and health programs.

Here at UWO, we operate in partnership because the State of Wisconsin has its own agency that regulates workplace safety. The Department of Safety and Professional Services handles all state institutions. Keep in mind that the standards have to be “as comprehensive” as the OSHA standards or more so. Right now we are making adjustments to our programs that will reflect the change from the Dept of Commerce to the Dept Safety and Professional Services. Stay tuned they’ll be on the website soon.

Housekeeping Helps Keep Everyone Safe

Don’t wait for a formal safety inspection to find examples of poor housekeeping in your department. Everyone benefits from good housekeeping efforts:

- Materials, tools, are easier to find and harder to lose.
- Obsolete items stand out, so it’s easier to dispose of materials that aren’t needed.
- There’s a lower risk for fire when there’s less clutter.
- People have less of a chance of slipping, tripping, or falling when the aisles are clean and clear.
- Orderly surroundings make you feel better — you can be proud of where you work.

Take a little time each day to put things away and keep the facility tidy. Use the following checklist to help you improve the housekeeping in your area:

- Is access to exits kept clear at all times?
- Are wet floors around entryways mopped up?
- Is storage kept out of the aisles?
- Are carts or trucks parked so that they aren’t blocking aisles?
- Are cords kept from laying across an aisle?
- Is there enough clearance around fire doors so they can close properly in case of an emergency?
- Is there clear access to all fire extinguishers and pull alarms?
- Are all the fire extinguishers hanging where they belong?

- Is there at least 18 inches of clearance under all sprinkler heads?
- Is there plenty of clearance around electrical panels?
- Are hazardous chemicals kept in closed containers when they aren't in use?
- Are hazardous chemicals put back into proper storage after use?
- Is machinery and equipment kept free of clutter and debris?
- Is trash removed often enough so rubbish doesn't take over?
- Are the floors swept when dirt, dust, shavings, or scraps accumulate?
- Are tools, nails, pencils, etc. picked up if they've been dropped?
- Can storage shelves support the weight of the materials on them?
- Is storage on shelves stable so that nothing hangs over the edge?
- Are cartons, pallets, or other stacked materials arranged so the stacking is stable?
- Are items that have to be stored leaning on-end supported so they will not fall over or slide down?
- Are exposed nails removed from crates, lumber, or pallets?
- Is food kept away from areas where toxic materials are used?
- Is food prohibited from being stored in restrooms?
- Is leftover food thrown away in leak-proof containers with covers?



Housekeeping chores are easy to put off when you're busy, but organized cleaning and storage really does help the work go more smoothly.

Your Hearing: Keep it for a Lifetime

Most of us go through life taking our senses for granted. Like touching, tasting, smelling, and seeing; hearing is something we do automatically, without giving it much thought. But when something goes wrong with any of our senses, including our hearing, we expect that medical science has a miracle to offer. Unfortunately, medicine offers only moderate improvement for people with hearing loss. Hearing loss cannot be restored for most people. Lots of people suffer some degree of hearing loss. Farmers, construction workers, people exposed to constant loud noise on the job, whether at home or through their hobbies (even fans of loud music!), have at least one thing in common. They are at risk of permanent hearing loss. Exposure to normal noise levels doesn't cause hearing loss. Hearing loss occurs because of overexposure to high noise levels. Noise is measured in units called "decibels." The higher the decibel, the louder the noise. To help you see the difference in the decibel scale, look at these examples of various noise levels:



- 20 - decibels soft whisper
- 30 - leaves rustling, very soft music
- 60 - normal speech, background music
- 85 - heavy machinery with soundproof cab
- 90 - lawnmower, shop tools
- 100 - heavy machinery without soundproof cab, motorcycles
- 115 - loud music, sand blasting
- 140 - jet engine, shotgun

In the workplace, hearing protection must be used to reduce noise exposure for any one who is generally exposed to 90 decibels or more over the course of their workday. Hearing protection may be used at lower levels, particularly for people who are very close to the 90 decibel exposure level. Sounds above 120 decibels can cause hearing damage after only a brief exposure and should be avoided unless hearing protection is worn.

Speaking of hearing protection, you've probably seen lots of different types. Keep in mind that not every type of hearing protection is good for every type of noise. Disposable foam earplugs may be fine for some noise exposure. Earmuff-type protection may be suitable for another.

It is the employer's responsibility to assess noise exposures and provide appropriate hearing protection as needed for everyone in the workplace. It is the worker's responsibility to use the protection consistently and correctly. Hearing protection is no use if it's not worn.

Keep in mind that equipment operators aren't the only ones who may need protection. Other people who work nearby may be exposed to too much noise, too. If you work in a noisy area-even if you're not the one making the noise-be aware of the hazard and use protection.

Another thing that might cause unnecessary noise exposure is poorly-maintained equipment. Keeping equipment properly lubricated and in good condition helps keep down the noise. If you become aware of noisy equipment that hasn't been noisy before, report the condition so proper hearing protection can be provided until necessary repairs are made.

Away from the workplace hearing protection is your total responsibility. Don't risk your hearing for the sake of a hobby. Keep the music at a reasonable level. It may be hard to admit, but if other people tell you your stereo is too loud, it probably is! If you ride a motorcycle or another noisy vehicle, protect your hearing. In your workshop, use hearing protection that's appropriate to protect against the noise. Don't forget the lawn mower!

Think of those sounds you take for granted and imagine life without them. Don't let unnecessary exposure to noise take them away. You can do something to help protect your hearing. Take the time to know what protection to use and use it faithfully. Your hearing can last a lifetime with a few common-sense precautions.

Do you have a campus safety concern? Susie Gustke did!

And the issue is being looked into!

Feel free to contact any member of the EH&S committee if you see or hear of situations that could impact the safety and wellbeing of any individual that has reason to be on our campus.