

Spot The Safety Violation: Protection from Invisible Safety Hazards



A fundamental safety measure is the use of PPE. But this worker apparently didn't get the memo. What type of PPE is he missing?



PPE is designed to protect workers from hazards they can see, such as sharp edges or falling objects, as well as those that are invisible, such as excessive noise. This worker should be wearing hearing protection while operating loud equipment such as this trencher. (It's unclear from the photo but it also appears he's not wearing a hardhat or safety boots.)

Solution: Excessive noise is a serious safety hazard in many types of workplaces, from construction sites to manufacturing facilities to bars and restaurants. Prolonged exposure to high noise levels can cause permanent and irreversible hearing loss. And workers may not realize their hearing is being affected until it's too late. In addition, hearing loss has other consequences, such as [susceptibility to dementia](#). But the good news is that nearly all work-related hearing loss is preventable.

When it comes to protecting workers from excessive noise, the preferred safety measure is the use of engineering controls that eliminate or reduce the level of noise. *Examples:* use of

quieter machinery or putting noisy equipment in insulated rooms.

If engineering controls aren't possible or practical, then you should implement administrative controls, such as safe work practices. *Example:* rotate work schedules to limit workers' exposure to excessive noise.

But if engineering and administrative controls aren't 'practicable' or realistic, you must provide appropriate PPE, such as earmuffs or earplugs, for workers who are exposed to noise above permissible levels. And workers must actually use that PPE when necessary. (Here are [8 ways to get workers to wear PPE.](#))

8 Elements of a Hearing Conservation Plan

To ensure workers are adequately protected from excessive noise, develop and implement a [hearing conservation plan](#) that has these eight elements:

- Measurement of noise levels
- Engineered noise controls
- Administrative noise controls
- Signage
- Hearing PPE
- Hearing tests
- Worker education and training
- Annual plan review.

You can use this [checklist](#) to ensure that your hearing conservation plan covers all the bases.

Want to know the requirements for hearing conservation plans in your jurisdiction? Check out [this chart](#).