

# Winning Strategies for Hearing Loss Prevention

The NIOSH  
Safe-in-Sound Awards™



BY DEANNA K. MEINKE AND THAIS C. MORATA

How might hearing loss prevention programs be improved? NIOSH is helping answer this question with its Safe-in-Sound Awards™, which the agency created as a way to publicize success stories in hearing loss prevention. Through Safe-in-Sound, NIOSH obtains information about successful real-world hearing loss prevention programs and public health practices. By disseminating these successful strategies, Safe-in-Sound helps other groups to advance hearing loss prevention practices.

NIOSH created the Safe-in-Sound Excellence in Hearing Loss Prevention Award in partnership with the National Hearing Conservation Association (NHCA) in late 2006. There are three Safe-in-Sound Awards, one for each of the three North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) sectors providing startup funding for the project: construction, manufacturing and services. In addition, a fourth award for "innovation in hearing loss prevention" was established to recognize individuals and/or business entities, regardless of their sector. Industry safety personnel are encouraged to nominate their own businesses as well as others working toward hearing loss prevention in the workplace.

The Safe-in-Sound Awards are presented annually at the NHCA annual conference by the NIOSH director or his or her representative. The awards were first presented in 2009, and current and past award winners can be viewed at [www.safeinsound.us/winners.html](http://www.safeinsound.us/winners.html).

At AIHee 2012, attendees will have the opportunity to honor the 2012 Safe-in-Sound Award recipients during a congratulatory ceremony during Roundtable 203, "What Is 85/3, and Why Noise Is More Hazardous Than You Think," on June 18. Three winners are being recognized in 2012: one in the construction sector, and two in the manufacturing sector. In addition, NIOSH presented the first ever corporate-wide Safe-in-Sound award this year.

## 2012 Safe-in-Sound Award Recipients

**3M, Hutchinson Plant.** The hearing conservation program at the 3M plant in Hutchinson, Minn., was recognized for its all-inclusive and strongly integrated approach to worker hearing health, including statistically driven noise exposure assessments, implementation of a buy-quiet equipment program and noise control for existing equipment. In addition, the plant was recognized for comprehensive implementation of hearing protection fit-testing

of all personnel, availability of both general and specialty hearing protection devices for off-the-job noise exposures, high-quality audiometric testing and strong support from corporate management, plant management and individual workers. This 3M program was tailored for individualized training and development of a culture of personal responsibility to maintain noise controls, identify noise hazards and properly fit and utilize hearing protectors throughout the facility.



**Bechtel National Inc., BSII, Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant Project.** The Hanford Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant (WTP) is the world's largest radioactive waste treatment plant. It is being designed, constructed, and commissioned by Bechtel National, Inc. in Richland, Wash. The Bechtel Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant Project was recognized for the comprehensive integration of its hearing loss prevention program components; for innovative strategies to address industry-specific challenges in noise monitoring, risk evaluation and risk communication; for adopting the NIOSH-recommended exposure limit of 85 dB with the 3 dB exchange rate; for promoting the active involvement of the work force in their efforts; and for encouraging other Bechtel sites to adopt these strategies.

**Colgate-Palmolive (CP)** is the first company to receive a Safe-in-Sound Award at a corporate level. CP achieved

advances in noise reduction across the corporation through a partnering of the Noise, Energy and Maintenance corporate teams with external consultants and suppliers. Examples of their interventions include company-wide adoption of the NIOSH-recommended 85-dBA threshold limit value for 8-hour noise exposures; application of the 3-dB exchange rate for

noise exposure assessments; completion of multiple noise-control studies throughout each business unit to identify all noise sources affecting worker exposure; dissemination of an internal CP handbook on noise control; establishment of checklists for sustaining low-noise levels; and the adoption of buy-quiet and design-quiet policies.

### More than a Trophy

Many previous Safe-in-Sound award winners report that the award provided leverage and opportunities to expand their hearing loss prevention initiatives. Pilot programs have been adopted by other entities or in other geographical regions. New strategies are spreading corporate-wide, and professional/government organizations are discussing new policies, guidelines and procedures. The Safe-in-Sound Award establishes credibility, especially for those award winners who stretch traditional boundaries with novel or unique approaches.

The awards not only recognize facilities that have reached a pinnacle of achievement, they motivate the award winners to pursue additional improvements and to reach for higher goals. In addition, the award has facilitated the extension of successful hearing loss prevention activities and strategies to workers that are not traditionally considered in typical workplace hearing loss prevention programs, such as musicians and military personnel.

### 2013 Safe-in-Sound Awards

If your organization has implemented excellence in hearing loss prevention or has innovative approaches unique to your workforce, the Safe-in-Sound Award expert committee encourages you to apply for the next round of awards in 2013. Application instructions are available at [www.safeinsound.us/application.html](http://www.safeinsound.us/application.html). The deadline for submitting applications is Sept. 3, 2012.

For more information about Safe-in-Sound, visit [www.safeinsound.us](http://www.safeinsound.us), or e-mail [info@safeinsound.us](mailto:info@safeinsound.us). Follow Safe-in-Sound on Twitter at @SafeInSoundUS.

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