



## Safe-in-Sound Awards™: Recognizing and promoting effective hearing loss prevention

By: *Thais Morata, Ph.D., and; Deanna K. Meinke, Ph.D*

The Safe-in-Sound Excellence in Hearing Loss Prevention Award™ was created in a partnership between the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the National Hearing Conservation Association (NHCA) in late 2006 ([www.safeinsound.us](http://www.safeinsound.us)). The objective of this initiative was to obtain information about real world successful hearing loss prevention programs and public health practices currently in use in industry and disseminate it widely. The rationale behind this initiative was that by disseminating evidence-based strategies, Safe-in-Sound™ could enable other groups to effectively advance hearing loss prevention practice.

In 2007, NIOSH facilitated the organization and meeting of an expert committee comprised of members' with diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise relevant to hearing loss prevention in construction, agriculture, regulatory practices and general industry. The expert committee has been responsible for the logo creation, award development, application review, candidate site visits, annual award winner selections and recognition ceremony. Three "Safe-in-Sound Excellence in Hearing Loss Prevention Awards™" were established; one for each of the three North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) sectors providing start up funding for project; Construction (23), Manufacturing (31-33) and Services (51-56, 61, 71-72, 81 & 92). In addition, a fourth award for "Innovation in Hearing Loss" was established to recognize individuals and/or business entities, regardless of sector/NAICS code affiliation.

Several premises have provided guidance for the Safe-in-Sound Excellence in Hearing Loss Prevention Award™ since its inception. First, the award criteria must be adaptable to different work conditions and administrative structures inherent within some work sectors. Second, it is desirable to see this award encompass all industry sectors, therefore expansion of the criteria for other sectors were also given consideration. Third, the ultimate goal of preventing noise-induced hearing loss was the focus of our efforts and *not* regulatory compliance. This will assure that the awards progress beyond an outdated US regulatory compliance audit. Fourth, the award applicants were given the freedom to demonstrate their evidence of hearing loss prevention in a manner that best exemplifies this goal and is more germane to their efforts. Fifth, innovation and quality are highly valued and recognized. Sixth, there currently is no "gold standard" for measuring the objective success of hearing loss prevention programs; therefore, we must rely on indicators that are felt to be associated with success in their hearing loss prevention effort. Lastly, the award criteria must be dynamic and adaptable to the ongoing process.

The Safe-in-Sound Award™ implements a rigorous systematic review process to capture and evaluate the successes and lessons learned from examples of excellence in hearing loss prevention. Award applications are submitted online (<http://www.safeinsound.us/application.html>) and undergo a series of reviews including: pre-screen for completeness; preliminary scores; first-round decisions; supplemental information requests; second-round decisions; selective site visits and final award decisions. The crystal awards (Figure 1) are presented annually at the NHCA annual conference by the NIOSH



### Excellence Award: Construction Sector

2012: **Bechtel National Inc.**, BSII, Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant Project – Richland, WA

### Excellence Award: Manufacturing Sector

2009: **Pratt & Whitney** – East Hartford Facility, CT

2009: **Domtar Paper Company** – Kingsport Mill, TN

2011: **Shaw Industries Group**, Fibers Division, Plant WM, GA

2012: **Colgate-Palmolive** – Worldwide Corporation

2012: **3M**, Hutchinson Plant– Hutchinson, MN

2013: **Vulcan Materials Company** (VMC), Companywide.

### Excellence Award: Services Sector

2009: **The Montgomery County Water Services** – OH

### Innovation Award: Construction Sector

2010: **The New York City Department of Environmental Protection (NYC DEP), NY and Parson Brinckerhoff, Inc.** – MA

### Innovation Award: Manufacturing Sector

2010: **Etymotic Research, Inc.** – Elk Grove Village, IL

2013: **Johns Manville (JM)**, a Berkshire Hathaway company.

### Innovation Award: Services Sector

2009: **Sensaphonics Hearing Conservation, Inc.**, – Chicago, IL

2010: **Dr. Kris Chesky and the College of Music, University of North Texas** – Denton, TX

2011: **CPT Leanne Cleveland and the Fort Carson (FC) Army Hearing Program** in Colorado Springs, CO.

2013: **Dangerous Decibels®**- Oregon Health & Science University, Portland State University, University of Northern Colorado and the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry

director or his or her representative. The first awards were presented in 2009. Current and past award winner presentations can be reviewed at <http://www.safeinsound.us/winners.html>. Safe-in-Sound Award™ winner values and characteristics are summarized in a recent journal manuscript by Meinke and Morata (2012) in the International Journal of Audiology (<http://informahealthcare.com/doi/abs/10.3109/1499207.2011.633569>).

Three winners were recognized in 2013; one for Excellence in Hearing Loss Prevention in the Manufacturing Sector and two for Innovation in Hearing Loss Prevention. They are:

- **Vulcan Materials Company (VMC)**, a major producer of construction aggregates; primarily crushed stone, sand and gravel. VMC operates 323 aggregates plants and other production and distribution facilities which serve 19 states, the District of Columbia, the Bahamas and Mexico. In 2011, VMC shipped approximately 143 million tons of construction aggregates, and also provided asphalt mix, ready-mixed concrete and paving construction services. VMC was recognized for their commitment and implementation of a quality data-driven hearing loss prevention program that extends beyond simple regulatory compliance. VMC's effort is especially noteworthy when one considers the diverse and ever-changing and challenging work environments that are characteristic of this industry. VMC has embraced innovative and cost-effective noise measurement and control strategies. Noise risks are prioritized and addressed systematically with careful attention to detail to assure prompt reporting, high quality data, detailed analysis, progress tracking and outcome assessments. VMC provides extensive noise measurement and control training and re-training for select employees to function as industrial hygiene support staff. This allows VMC to increase their noise hazard surveillance and intervention opportunities without sacrificing quality. VMC's is also leading the advancements in noise monitoring strategies for mobile workers by integrating sophisticated technologies such as GPS, and video into their noise measurement protocols. These novel approaches will benefit other industries in the future and contribute to the goal of eliminating occupational noise-induced hearing loss.
- **Johns Manville (JM)**, a Berkshire Hathaway company, is a leading manufacturer and marketer of premium-quality building insulation, commercial roofing, roof insulation, and specialty products for commercial, industrial and residential applications. JM employs 6500 employees in the U.S., Europe and Asia. JM was recognized for their development and application of innovative hearing loss prevention program metrics. Their "Hearing Conservation Pyramid" approach incorporates both leading and lagging indicators of hearing conservation program effectiveness. Rather than an injury-based focus which relied solely on the traditional significant threshold shift (STS) metric and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recordable hearing loss cases, JM has integrated three other metrics. These additional metrics include an early audiometric notch index, hearing protector personal attenuation ratings and a noise level index designed to track noise exposure levels weighted by FTEs. The implementation of the JM "Hearing Conservation Pyramid" approach initiated noise control engineering training which ultimately resulted in the completion of successful noise control projects and stimulated resource sharing between plants. The JM revised metric approach has been enthusiastically embraced by both plant managers and employees due to their ability to directly impact the noise exposure of workers. This innovative JM data driven approach has demonstrated practical implementation in the short-term and will provide for long-term program monitoring

and advocacy. The JM "Hearing Conservation Pyramid" is readily adaptable to other noise-exposed industries who wish to become proactive rather than reactive to the risk of noise-induced hearing loss among their workforce.

- **Dangerous Decibels®**, a multi-faceted, evidence-based intervention program dedicated to the prevention of noise-induced hearing loss and tinnitus. The Dangerous Decibels program has been built upon collaborative partnerships between the Oregon Health & Science University, the Portland State University, the University of Northern Colorado and the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry with widespread funding and dissemination support by numerous organizations. Dangerous Decibels was recognized for their development, widespread dissemination and cultural adaptation of innovative training strategies shown to positively change knowledge, attitudes and behaviors in youth and adults. The program is unique in terms of the solid scientific and theoretical basis which incorporates health communication theory into all program aspects including science museum exhibits, virtual exhibits, K-12 classroom programs, educator training workshops, "Jolene – How Loud is Your Music" public outreach tools and research. Dangerous Decibels emphasizes the need to protect hearing for a "lifetime" and bridges the occupational and non-occupational noise risks. Dangerous Decibels is changing the culture of hearing loss prevention across all ages and investing in the hearing health of current and future workers.

Prevention of noise-induced hearing loss is frequently an over-looked area of health and safety and the award serves to highlight their accomplishments and remind a larger audience of the importance of these efforts. Many organizations/employers reported that the award provided leverage and opportunities to expand the reach of the current approaches; pilot programs have been adopted by other entities or in other geographical regions (see <http://www.safeinsound.us/impact.html>).

Advanced hearing loss prevention strategies are spreading corporate-wide and professional/government organizations are discussing new policies, guidelines and/or procedures. The Safe-in-Sound Award™ establishes credibility, especially for those award winners who stretch traditional boundaries with novel or unique approaches. Rather than the awards serving to only recognize those that have reached a pinnacle of achievement, it actually motivates the award winners to pursue additional program improvements and to reach higher goals. Personal commitments are renewed, re-dedicated and re-energized. In addition, the award has facilitated the extension of successful hearing loss prevention activities and strategies toward workers that are not traditionally considered in typical workplace hearing loss prevention programs (e.g. musicians, military personnel) and beyond the confines of the traditional workplace into the home and recreational/community settings.

Public input to the website and to the award program can be sent to [info@safeinsound.us](mailto:info@safeinsound.us) or to our Twitter account at @SafeinSoundUS. 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 our next round of awards in 2014. Application instructions and online submission are available at <http://www.safeinsound.us/application.html>. CAOHC course instructors and occupational hearing conservationists are in a unique position to identify potential candidates for future awards, please visit the website and consider applying or encouraging others to apply.

## REFERENCES

Meinke, D.K., Morata, T.C. (2012). Awarding and promoting excellence in hearing loss prevention. *International Journal of Audiol.* 51: S63-70.

## DISCLAIMER

Mention of any company or product does not constitute endorsement by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

## FOOTNOTE:

<sup>1</sup> John R. Franks, Lee Hager, James Lankford, Deanna Meinke, Thais Morata, Rick Neitzel, Scott Schneider and Noah Seixas.

*Thais C. Morata, Ph.D. (Safe-in-Sound Project Director) is an audiologist who has been working in the area of hearing loss prevention since 1982. A native of Brazil, she earned degrees in Speech Pathology and Audiology, and Communication Disorders from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (B.S.; M.S.) and the University of Cincinnati (Ph.D.).*

*Deanna K. Meinke, Ph.D. (Safe-in-Sound Expert Committee Coordinator), has focused her career on the prevention of noise induced hearing loss as a clinician, educator, researcher and advocate. She is currently an Associate Professor of Audiology and Speech-Language Sciences at the University of Northern Colorado.*

## CAOHC unveils new logo and website

It's a year of exciting changes for CAOHC.

CAOHC's new visual identity is the biggest change. The Council has introduced a fresh logo featuring a dark blue ear with green sound waves entering into it. The ear and sound wave imagery reflect CAOHC'S mission of promoting hearing loss prevention by enhancing the quality of occupational hearing loss prevention practices. Unlike the old logo, which used earmuff imagery and emphasized hearing protection devices, the new logo represents CAOHC's overall, holistic mission of best practices in hearing loss prevention. The color blue radiates authority and trustworthiness and symbolizes CAOHC's important role of developing best practices in hearing loss prevention. The color green, which infers serenity and health, symbolizes how a good hearing conservation program can make a workplace a healthier, more peaceful place.

In addition to a new logo, CAOHC is launching a new website. The redesigned website, which will go live in June, will have a contemporary look, feature the new logo and color scheme and will be easier to navigate. More importantly, it will include much useful new information for Occupational Hearing Conservationists, Course Directors, Professional Supervisors, employers, and employees.

In a move that will save money and reduce paper waste, *Update* has been converted into a digital-only publication. Three times a year, *Update's* readers—Occupational Hearing Conservationists, Course Directors and Professional Supervisors—will receive an email letting them know that the latest issue has been posted on the website. Please make sure the CAOHC office has your current email address. You can send your current contact information to [info@CAOHC.org](mailto:info@CAOHC.org).

Please check our website often for information on our new look.

