

# Congratulations to the winners of the 7th Safe-in-Sound Excellence in Hearing Loss Prevention Award™

by **Thais C. Morata and Deanna K. Meinke**

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. The objective of this initiative is to obtain information about real-world successful hearing loss prevention programs and public health practices currently used in industry, and disseminate it widely. By disseminating evidence-based strategies, Safe-in-Sound™ could enable other groups to effectively advance hearing loss prevention practice. The first awards were presented in 2009, and have since been presented annually. This year, the awards were presented at the 40th Annual NHCA Conference on February 20th, 2015 in New Orleans, Louisiana. The award recipients were also recognized at the 2015 American Industrial Hygiene Conference & Exposition.

In 2015 a Safe-in-Sound Excellence Award™ was presented to the entire United Technologies Corporation (UTC) as it represents an example of excellence across multiple industries and geographical locations. UTC is a global company with over 210,000 employees from 46 states and 186 countries. This is only the second time that a Safe-in-Sound Excellence Award™ was presented to an entire corporation. [In 2009, Pratt & Whitney's East Hartford, CT Facility (a United Technologies company) was one of the inaugural recipients of the Safe-in-Sound™ Excellence in Hearing Loss Prevention Awards.] UTC was recognized for including in its current sustainability goals, "to reduce employee exposure to noise and chemicals to levels so safe that wearing personal protective equipment is no longer mandatory" and for the subsequent multi-level strategies used to support the diverse companies within the corporation to fulfill that goal. Their comprehensive approach to hearing loss prevention and commitment to employee hearing health and noise control are exceptional. Their approach includes corporation-wide interventions such as: reduction of sound levels below an 85-dBA limit for 8-hour noise exposures, adoption of inclusive criteria in their comprehensive hearing loss prevention program,

completion of multiple noise-control studies throughout each business unit to identify all noise sources affecting worker exposure, documentation of cost and noise reduction results, and the adoption of Buy-Quiet policies and practices. Employees at all levels of the corporation are engaged in the initiatives and each individually contributes to these noteworthy accomplishments.

The Mahart Mill of Cottonwood, Alabama...a Mead Westvaco Corporation (MWV) plant...was the second 2015 Safe in Sound Excellence in Hearing Loss Prevention Award™ recipient from the manufacturing sector. The intrinsic nature of the noise hazards at a paper mill approaching its 50th anniversary makes them difficult to control. This translates into challenges and elevates the importance for the other hearing loss prevention efforts. The subsequent reliance upon hearing protection and effective training becomes even more critical when practical noise controls are elusive. In addition, recognition of the importance of audibility and communication, that is critical to employee safety, is also a relevant consideration. The Mahart Mill Hearing Conservation Team developed and implemented engaging educational programs, provided two alternative types of hearing protection fit-testing of all plant personnel, selected a diverse assortment of effective general and specialty hearing protection devices for both work and recreational application, and conducted high quality audiometric testing with professional review and employee follow-up. There is evidence of strong support from plant management and individual workers and each recognizes their role in the success of the program. Their teamwork commitment to each individual at risk of noise-induced hearing loss and tinnitus is especially noteworthy. The employees of Mahart Mill were recognized for changing their course towards hearing health and their efforts to actively encourage the adoption of their strategies by other MWV sites.

NIOSH Director Dr. John Howard congratulated the award recipients by saying, "We know that noise-induced



Back row, from left to right: David Senft (UTC), Mike Nightingale (UTC), Phillip Sims (UTC); Front row, from left to right: Matthew Twerdy (UTC), Sara Kerr (UTC), Rosolyn Durden (MWV), Courtney Tinner (MWV), Cathy Porter (MWV), Hazel Ladner (MWV).

hearing loss can affect workers in any sector of the economy and that it has a significant impact on the individual, their family, and our nation's economy. We are honored to once again have this opportunity to recognize organizations that are leading the way in preventing work-related hearing loss and keeping workers safe and healthy." His remarks and the award recipient presentations can be seen in full at <http://www.safeinsound.us/winners.html>.

The Safe-in-Sound Award™ serves to highlight the real-world accomplishments of awardees and remind a larger public audience of the importance of these efforts. Several of the winning approaches are readily adaptable to diverse industries. A large cross-section of workers could benefit if similar noise control efforts are undertaken in the future. The Award application itself may be a catalyst for stimulating a program evaluation from a new perspective... "what are we doing right?" Winning organizations/employers reported that the Safe-in-Sound Award™ provided leverage and opportunities to expand the reach of their current approaches; pilot programs have been adopted by other en-

ties or in other geographical regions. Winners indicated having received greater administrative/managerial support with additional resources allocated to their hearing loss prevention efforts. New 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, hunters, and military personnel). For additional information about the award program, please visit the website at [www.safeinsound.us](http://www.safeinsound.us) and follow us on Twitter (@SafeInSoundUS).

# spectrum

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## 2015 Annual Outstanding Lecture and Poster Awards



Each year attendees have an opportunity to vote on the Outstanding Lecture and Outstanding Poster awards from all those who have presented at our conference. This year we were only able to select an Outstanding Lecture Award (OLA) winner.

We are proud to announce that the OLA winner at the 40th annual NHCA conference in New Orleans is Ms. Pegeen Smith, RN, MS, Occupational Health Nurse and Technical Service Product Specialist for the 3M

Personal Safety Division for her presentation entitled, *Assessing Attitudes Towards Use of Hearing Protection Devices and Effects of an Intervention Based on Results of Fit Testing*.

Pegeen will be presented with an award certificate and a \$250 check. NHCA congratulates Pegeen for her outstanding contribution to the conference, to 3M, and...most importantly...to hearing conservation and hearing loss prevention.

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