

Hearing Conservation Programs in Manufacturing Industries

2.1 Introduction to the NIOSH Safe and Sound Award

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The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has been involved in concerns about hearing loss since the inception of the Institute in 1970 and it still plays an active role. The NIOSH policy document, *Occupational Noise Exposure*, published in 1998, maintains a recommendation of 85 dB(A) for an eight-hour exposure limit with a 3 dB exchange rate.¹

In 2014, NIOSH launched a web page for public use on controls for noise exposure. The Institute's goal for the workshop is to promote awareness of successful noise control programs and to talk about what can be done to advance awareness and encourage more industries to take an interest in good business practices and good technologies that are available. NIOSH shares these goals with the TQA Follow-up Committee, the National Academy of Engineering, and the INCE Foundation.

Noise-induced hearing loss has been a public health problem for decades. Hearing conservation programs need to be improved. Innovative strategies are needed. NIOSH tries to reach out and share information with scientists, policymakers and to publish guidelines and best practices.

In the United States, regulation is not a strong driver for noise control. NIOSH decided to offer awards and incentives, to create an award program to recognize effective programs and innovations and to promulgate the adoption of improved practices. The result is the Safe-in-Sound Award², launched in 2009 in partnership with the National Hearing Conservation Association.³ The aim is to obtain information about real-world successful hearing loss prevention programs and public health practices used by industry and to disseminate those widely.

The Safe-in-Sound Award acknowledges companies that have demonstrated excellence in hearing loss prevention. Industries are invited to self nominate. Applications are submitted online and undergo a series of systematic reviews; selective site visits are conducted. Characteristics of the annual award winners were summarized and published in 2012 in the *International Journal of Audiology*.

Pratt & Whitney, winner of the first Excellence Award in 2009, had a cross-functional team including members from many different departments. They engaged the workforce to catalog all processes with A-weighted noise levels above 85 dB, then prioritized and implemented more than 500 successful noise reduction projects and "Buy-Quiet" initiatives.

The program has realized several positive outcomes. The award recipient earns important recognition within the company and effects are expanded in other parts of the company. They receive additional internal support for noise-control efforts. The award establishes credibility for innovative approaches and motivates the pursuit of additional program improvements. Personal commitments are renewed. New strategies are spreading corporate-wide and professional and government organizations are discussing new policies, guidelines, and/or procedures.

¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/98-126/pdfs/98-126.pdf>

² <http://www.safeinsound.us/winners.html>

³ <http://www.hearingconservation.org/>

Winners of the Safe-in-Sound Award:

Excellence Award	
2009	Pratt & Whitney – East Hartford Facility, Connecticut
2009	Domtar Paper Company – Kingsport Mill, Tennessee
2011	Shaw Industries Group - , Plant WM, Georgia
2012	3M, Hutchinson Plant – Hutchinson, Minnesota
2012	Colgate-Palmolive – Worldwide ⁴
2014	Northrop Grumman Electronic Systems – Linthicum, Maryland
2014	Benjamin Kanters and Hear Tomorrow, Columbia College – Chicago, Illinois
2015	United Technologies Corporate Award
2015	MeadWestvaco Corporation – Cottenton, Alabama
Innovation Award	
2010	Etymotic Research, Inc. – Elk Grove Village, Illinois
2013	Johns Manville – Worldwide

Chapter 5 of OSHA Technical Manual (OTM), Section III provides technical information and guidance to help Compliance Safety and Health Officers (CSHOs) evaluate noise hazards in the workplace.

NIOSH would like to collect success stories and then share that information with others to promulgate effective noise control and show that it is feasible and good business. If worksites reported their results on reducing worker exposure, it would bring their noise control full-circle.

⁴ A short description of Colgate-Palmolive’s program is available in Appendix G of the OSHA Technical Manual (OTM) Section III: Chapter 5:
https://www.osha.gov/dts/osta/otm/new_noise/#appendixg

Reducing Employee Noise Exposure in Manufacturing Best Practices, Innovative Techniques, and the Workplace of the Future

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