

HOW IMPORTANT IS HEARING PROTECTION, AND WHY EVEN BOTHER ?

By Dennis Mudd, BOP Safety Dept.

"Consider the scenario, you are 23 years old, have a wife and a 6-month old child and have just been hired for your first full time job. The medical hearing test van travels to your work site and does a random selection of employees for hearing tests. You are selected and an hour after you are tested, you are called back into the van for a discussion with the doctor.

"That can be a very uncomfortable situation, particularly if you are new to the job and you don't really understand what all the fuss is about with regards to hearing protection and having to wear earplugs. If you dial the clock back 22+ years, that is exactly what happened to me when I first went to work for Mobil Oil Corp. in the oil fields of South Texas. You see, I had grown up hunting, working on oil rigs, operating chain saws, and large farming equipment without the use of hearing protection. Back in the day, we didn't use hearing protection; in fact, if you did use it, you were kind of looked at funny and considered to be one of those guys who did things just so you would get noticed or was a sissy.

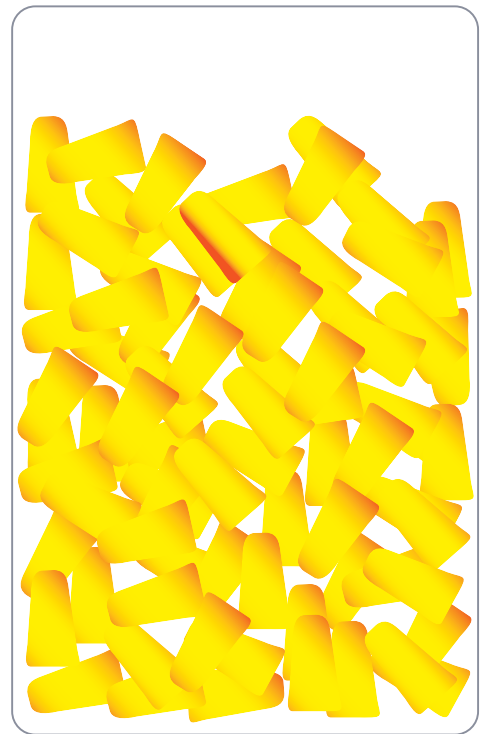
*"Well, that day changed not only my life, but also how I view the necessity of hearing protection. That day the doctor laid it out to me very clear. He explained, **'Son you are 23 years old and you have the hearing of a 45+ year old man, and if you keep it up, you won't be able to hear your children when they call your name, or worse than that, when they call and need your help.'** That was all it took; not only did I change my habits, but I bought a box of hearing protection devices (earplugs) and took them home.*

*"If you have talked to me in the field, you know the first thing I always check for is whether or not you are wearing your hearing protection properly, and if you aren't, then we will have a talk. As for the need for hearing protection, it is really **not an option**, and something that I challenge everyone to take very seriously. So the next time you head out to the field, take the extra time to make sure you use your hearing protection properly, and by this I mean the proper insertion of your ear plugs so that you get the maximum protection provided. And if you are working around loud equipment, go ahead and wear double hearing protection. Don't wait for Industrial Hygiene to tell you that you need double hearing protection; we all know when equipment is loud. Think of it this way, when it rains does someone have to tell you to put on a raincoat, or when it is cold outside, to wear a coat? **Be the one that sets the example by doing the right thing the right way, both "On and Off" the job, each and every time, and when necessary, be the one that intervenes with your co-workers and reminds them to do the right thing.**"*

Reminders:

Proper Earplug Use: To insert earplugs it is important that you use clean hands and inspect the plugs for any wax, dirt, or grease. Roll the plug between your fingers, pull the top of the ear up and out, insert the earplug into the ear canal, let go of your ear, and allow the earplug to expand, which takes approximately 30 seconds. After inserting the plugs, your voice should sound louder to you if the earplugs are working properly.

Note that the ear canal is much longer than earplugs. Due to the length of earplugs, it is nearly impossible to over-insert an earplug. **To be effective, an earplug should be inserted such that an observer can just barely see the outside tip of the plug.**



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