

# **HEARING CONSERVATION HANDOUT (FIRE/EMS, MAINTENANCE, PWD, & SHERIFF – sworn)**

- NIOSH estimates that 30 million Americans are exposed to hazardous noise on the job, resulting in a permanent hearing loss to about 10 million workers and partial hearing loss to many more millions.
- Noise induced hearing loss is 100% preventable but once acquired, hearing loss is permanent and irreversible.

## **OCCUPATIONAL NOISE EXPOSURE**

- Noise or unwanted sound is one of the most pervasive occupational health problems.
- Exposure to high levels of noise causes hearing loss, the extent of damage depends on the intensity of the noise and the duration of exposure.
- Noise induced hearing loss can be temporary or permanent:
  - Temporary hearing loss results from short-term exposures to noise with hearing returning to normal after a period of rest.
  - Permanent hearing loss is generally caused by prolonged exposure to high noise levels over a period of time.

## **MONITORING**

- OSHA's hearing conservation program requires employers to monitor noise exposure levels to accurately identify employees exposed to noise at or above 85 decibels (dB) over an 8-hour time-weighted average (TWA).

## **AUDIOMETRIC TESTING**

- Audiometric testing is required for all employees having an occupational exposure to noise. They monitor an employee's hearing over time; it also provides an opportunity for employees to educate employees on hearing conservation.
- Employers need to make audiometric testing available at no cost to employees who are exposed to noise level of 85dB or above.
- The first test is known as a "Baseline". The baseline audiogram is referenced audiogram against future audiograms for comparison.
  - Employer must provide a baseline audiogram within 6 months of an employee's first exposure at or above 85 dB and annually thereafter.

## **HEARING PROTECTORS**

- An employer is required to provide hearing protectors to all employees exposed to noise levels of 85 dB or above over an 8 hour TWA.
- Employees must wear hearing protectors if exposed to noise at or greater than 90 dB.
- Employer should provide employees with a selection of protector.

