

## **OCCUPATIONAL HEARING LOSS:** 4 TRENDS YOU SHOULD LISTEN TO

Work-related noise induced hearing loss (NIHL) remains the most common prevalent and preventable occupational injury in ASEAN. So what does the future hold for this 'silent', and too often neglected, illness? Whilst evidence suggests that NIHL is becoming more widespread across industry, increased awareness could be the answer to a more optimistic outlook, as the following four trends demonstrate.



### **1 REGULATIONS ARE RECOGNISING NIHL AS A MAJOR RISK**

Hearing conservation has been considered a low priority in the health and safety community for too long and hasn't received the recognition it deserves. However, the EU's adoption of a new PPE Regulation is an important step forward because it re-evaluates the importance of hearing protection. While the regulation doesn't provide any specific guidance around training and how it should be carried out, the fact that hearing protection has moved to Category III – the highest risk category – suggests that it needs to be taken more seriously by employers. This should motivate safety managers to access the training support they need to ensure workers are properly equipped to work in noisy environments.

### **2 FIT-TESTING IS TAKING CENTRE STAGE**

Not fitting hearing protection properly is one of the main causes of NIHL. This is why training programmes and hearing protection with integrated fit-testing should always be at the heart of any hearing conservation effort. The good news is that the importance of fit-testing is increasingly being recognised by the safety industry and is expected to become a legal requirement in some countries. The US-based Directorate of Standards & Guidance, for example, recognised the importance of ensuring that "PPE must properly fit each employee" at the 2017 International Safety Equipment Association (ISEA) Annual Meeting. Additionally, a standard for fit-testing system performance has been approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and is expected to be published in 2018. The European Committee for Standardisation (CEN) is also considering a similar standard. This is promising because making fit-testing mandatory would go a long way towards tackling NIHL.

### **3 GROWING AWARENESS OF CONSEQUENCES FOR BUSINESS**

It is becoming more and more apparent that the effects of NIHL are not only felt by individuals, but also by businesses. Incidences of payouts and insurance claims for NIHL are on the rise, and in 2017 insurance companies reported that in the previous three years alone, claims had **risen by up to 300%**. Strikingly, industrial hearing loss has become the occupational disease with the highest number of civil claims accounting for about **75% of all occupational disease claims**. Increasing awareness of this means that tackling NIHL is becoming a top priority for businesses that not only want to protect their workforce's health, but also reduce cost and improve productivity.

### **4 PROTECTING THE FUTURE GENERATIONS OF WORKERS**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), **1.1 billion young people are at risk of NIHL globally**. Strikingly, nearly half of all teenagers and young adults (12 – 35 year olds) in middle- and high-income countries are exposed to unsafe levels of sound from the use of personal audio devices and 4 in 10 are at risk of damaging their hearing at clubs, discos and bars<sup>[1]</sup>. Millennials are subsequently more likely to enter the workplace with pre-existing hearing damage. However, raising awareness of NIHL by instilling good practice into the next generation whilst they are at work could help prevent further injury inside, and hopefully also outside, the workplace.

#### **For more information**

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For further information on the risks associated with NIHL, download the whitepaper 'Understanding the causes and consequences of occupational hearing loss' [here](#)

#### References:

[1] WHO 2015, hearing loss due to recreational exposure to loud sounds: a review