Honeywell
HOWARD LEIGHT

4 REASONS TO PERSONALIZE HEARING PROTECTION AND WHY NOW IS THE TIME TO DO IT

What is the number one risk your workers face? If your answer is 'noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL)' then you are not alone. Exposure to hazardous noise is one of the most common occupational risk globally and a leading cause of NIHL. As NIHL is becoming even more widespread, the health and safety professionals tasked with preventing it are facing new challenges [1]. That is why now is the perfect time to embrace a more personalized approach to hearing loss prevention, and there are at least four good reasons for this:

1. MORE WORKERS AFFECTED BY NIHL

The number of people suffering from hearing loss is set to double from over 450 million today to 900 million by 2050. With an estimated 1.1 billion young people at risk of hearing loss due to unsafe recreational listening practices, tomorrow's workers will also be more likely to have pre-existing hearing damage when entering the workforce. Already, one in five workers suffering from an occupational illness reports NIHL as the illness, and the figure is likely to rise unless action is taken[1].

Catering to workers' individual needs will require a more personalized approach to hearing loss prevention. This will be key to ensuring their hearing is protected while avoiding overprotection, so workers don't miss out on any of the critical sounds they need or want to hear on the job.

2. RAPIDLY-CHANGING WORKFORCE

The workforce is changing rapidly, presenting health and safety professionals with a new set of challenges. To start with, remote workers are becoming the new normal as a result of digitalization: keeping their personal sound exposure in check can be a challenge for health and safety professionals. Workers are also changing jobs more frequently so many employers now need to factor in more time spent onboarding new workers, which often includes critical hearing loss prevention training[1]. Additionally, as workforces age, health problems caused by cumulative exposure to other physical agents in addition to noise may soon become the norm.

Again, a more personalized approach to hearing loss prevention is needed now more than ever to ensure that every worker's hearing is taken care of. From a broader choice of hearing protection styles and sizes (to enhance comfort and fit) to the ability to safely hear what is needed/wanted, there are many different ways in which personalization can make a difference.

3. BETTER STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS

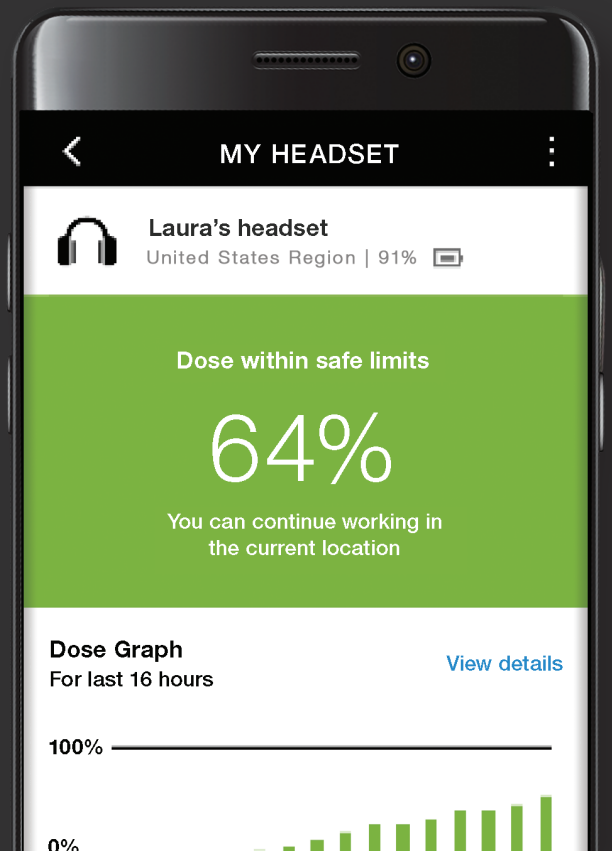
Gaps in legislation are one of the reasons why NIHL continues to be so prevalent. In light of some of the developments outlined above, more up-to-date regulations would potentially be welcome. Luckily, there are good reasons to believe that things are starting to change.

The fact that fit-testing is increasingly being acknowledged by the safety industry[2] is another important step toward more comprehensive legislation. For example, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) published a new standard for fit-testing system performance in 2018[3].

Standards and regulations that recognize individual worker needs support the role each worker plays in taking responsibility for their own safety. They can also provide safety professionals with guidance for personalizing hearing loss prevention and hearing protection for each worker.

4. SMARTER PPE AND BIGGER DATA

The combination of smart PPE and Big Data is the next evolutionary step in occupational safety and health (OSH), says the EU-OSHA in its 2018 report[4]. Having been ahead of the game for quite some time in areas such as dosimetry and fit testing, hearing loss prevention technology is particularly well positioned to embrace this new approach. And this will in turn help take personalization to the next level.



Web and mobile app data services wirelessly linked to hearing protection may give safety professionals actionable insights to provide personalized hearing loss prevention solutions for every worker, no matter if they work on site or remotely. Technologies such as automatic fit-testing combined with the ability to continuously monitor personal sound exposure in real time may also help speed up the onboarding and training of workers while enhancing their protection. Furthermore, it will be possible to monitor personal sound exposure over time to avoid health problems caused by cumulative exposure later in life.

For more information about the importance of personalization in understanding the causes and consequences of occupational Noise-Induced Hearing Loss download our whitepaper here.

[1] (n.d.). WHO 2018, Addressing the rising prevalence of hearing loss. Retrieved Sept.3, 2019, from http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/260336/9789241550260-eng.pdf

[2] (n.d.). BEST PRACTICE BULLETIN: Hearing Protection-Emerging Trends: Individual Fit Testing.Retrieved Sept.3, 2019, from https://www.hearingconservation.org/assets/docs/AllianceRecommendationForFitTesting_Final.pdf

[3] (n.d.). ANSI/ASA S12.71-2018: Performance Criteria For Systems That Estimate The Attenuation Of Passive Hearing Protectors For Individual Users. American National Standards Institute, New York.

[4] (n.d.). Official Journal of the European Union, REGULATION (EU) 2016/425 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 9 March 2016 on personal protective equipment and repealing Council Directive 89/686/EEC. Retrieved Sept.3, 2019, from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32016R0425

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