

City of Urbandale
Hearing Conservation Policy



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Purpose

This policy is designed to protect City employees from the harmful effects of workplace noise. Noise is any unwanted sound and is one of the most common health hazards at work. Hearing loss caused by noise can be temporary or permanent. In most cases, long-term exposure to loud noise over time causes permanent hearing damage.

A copy of this policy is available to all employees. It can be found online at www.urbandale.org/Safety or by contacting the employee's supervisor, a department Safety Leadership team member, or the Director of Risk Management/Support Services.

Policy Administration

The Director of Risk Management/Support Services is the program administrator and is responsible for reviewing this hearing conservation policy every year. Department supervisors are responsible for monitoring noise levels and selecting proper hearing protection.

Employees are responsible for correctly using, caring for, and maintaining the hearing protection provided by their department. Questions or concerns about this policy should be directed to the Director of Risk Management/Support Services or a department Safety Leadership representative.

Hearing Conservation Program and Participants

Employees who are exposed to noise levels of **90 decibels (dBA) or higher** are included in the hearing conservation program.

Employees must also be included in the program if they are exposed to **85 dBA or higher as an 8-hour Time-Weighted Average (TWA)**.

Protective Equipment Required.

Employees are expected to wear hearing protection when any of the following apply:

They are exposed to sound levels that are **85 decibels or higher** as an 8-hour Time-Weighted Average (TWA).

They have experienced a **permanent Standard Threshold Shift** based on an annual hearing test.

They are working in an area or using equipment that produces noise levels of **90 decibels or higher**.

Appropriate hearing protection will be provided at **no cost** for employees. Employees are responsible for using and maintaining this equipment correctly.

Engineering and Administrative Controls.

Noise Audits:

- Noise audits will be conducted by a qualified City employee or a third-party professional using **Appendix A** to document survey information.
- Areas and equipment that are known to exceed OSHA noise limits, or that seem louder than normal conversation, will be evaluated. Audits will be repeated whenever workplace changes could expose more employees to high noise levels.
- The city will notify employees of the audit results and inform them if their job exposes them to noise levels of **85 decibels or higher**.
- All locations and equipment that exceed the **85-decibel limit** will be clearly marked to warn employees of the noise hazard.
- Noise audit records will be kept for **at least 20 years**.

Hearing Conservation Training:

- Employees who work in areas or with equipment that exceed **85 decibels** must receive hearing conservation training **every year**.

Hearing Tests:

- Annual hearing tests will be provided for employees in the positions listed in **Appendix B**.
- Hearing tests will be provided at **no cost** for employees.
- After an employee's baseline hearing test is completed, hearing tests will be conducted **annually** for employees exposed to noise levels of **85 decibels or higher** as an 8-hour TWA.
- Hearing test records will be kept for the length of the employee's employment, **plus 30 years**.
- Hearing test results will be shared with employees as soon as they are received and whenever the employee requests them.

Standard Threshold Shift Guidelines:

- Employees will be notified in writing **within 21 days** if a standard threshold shift is identified. (OSHA defines a standard threshold shift as *"a change in hearing threshold compared to the baseline hearing test of an average of 10 decibels or more at 2000, 3000, and 4000 Hz in either ear."*)
- Each employee's annual hearing test will be compared to their original baseline test to determine whether a standard threshold shift has occurred.
- Hearing protection will be reviewed and adjusted if a standard threshold shift occurs, unless a physician determines that the change is **not related to work noise exposure**.
- If needed, the employee will be referred for a clinical hearing evaluation. This may occur if more testing is required or if the City believes a medical ear condition is caused or worsened using hearing protection.

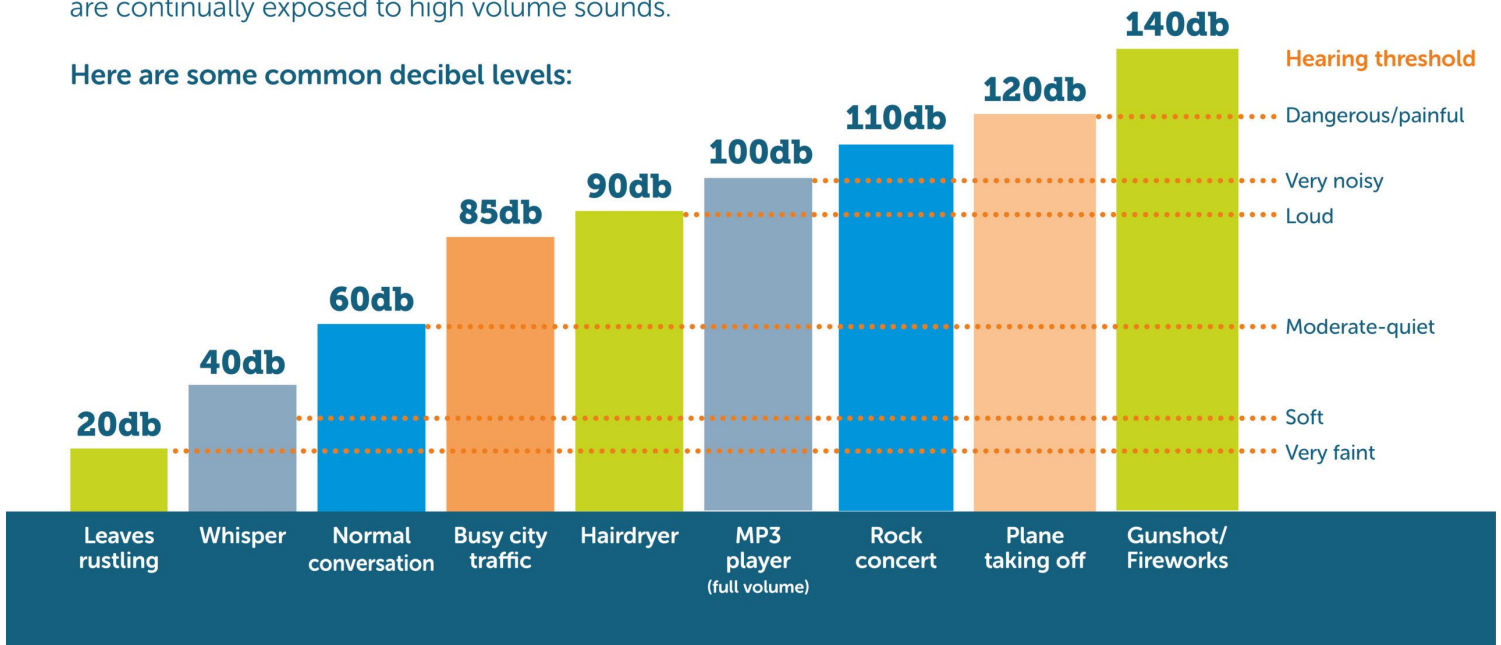
Recordkeeping.

Accurate records of employee noise exposure and hearing tests will be kept in accordance with federal and state regulations. Hearing tests are considered medical and exposure records and must be kept for the length of employment **plus 30 years**.

How loud is too loud?

Government research suggests the safe exposure limit is **85 decibels** for **eight hours a day**. Your hearing could be at risk of damage if you are continually exposed to high volume sounds.

Here are some common decibel levels:



APPENDIX B – ANNUAL HEARING TEST REQUIRED BY POSITION

Community Development:

- Building Inspector
- Building Inspector II

Engineering

- Engineering Technician
- Senior Engineering Technician

Fire Department:

- Fire Battalion Chief
- Fire/EMS Lieutenant
- Firefighter/EMT
- Firefighter/Paramedic
- Driver/Engineer

Parks & Recreation:

- Horticulture Technician
- Parks Laborer
- Turf Specialist

Public Works

- Heavy Equipment Operator
- Light Equipment Operator
- Mechanic
- Public Works Laborer
- Sewer System Operator
- Solid Waste Collection Operator

Water Utility:

- Backflow Coordinator
- Distribution Operator
- Distribution Supervisor
- Locator
- Meter Technician
- Operations Supervisor