

# Utility Workers—Hearing Loss From Noise

## 116 Electric power workers filed claims for hearing loss from 2000 to 2004



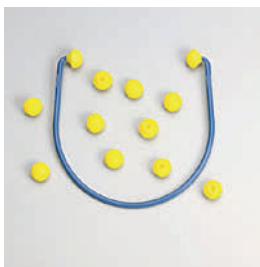
Hearing loss is a frequently identified reason for filing workers compensation claims for electric power utility workers. Hearing loss injuries are costly and affect your industrial insurance premiums. They contribute to the reason for the base rate of \$1.28 per hour per employee paid by contractors and employers in 2006. If your company has a higher than average number of injuries (claims), your “experience rating” could increase by as much as 25% in one year to \$1.59 per hour per employee.

Stated in another way, if you had 5 full-time workers and had an average number of injuries (claims), you would pay about \$13,312 in premiums in 2006. If your experience rating increased by 25% because you had higher than average injuries, you would pay about \$3,224 more or \$16,536 in premiums in 2006.

### Causes or sources of injury

Electric power utility workers at power generation plants or houses, such as hydroelectric dams or coal-fired plants, are exposed to extremely noisy turbines and generators. Utility workers around construction sites may be exposed to heavy machines and loud equipment, such as backhoes, tractors, trucks, compressors, power saws, jack hammers, and other tools commonly found at construction worksites.

A University of Washington study showed that most workers do not wear hearing protection at work, or only use it part of the time, even when working around noisy equipment.



Some hearing protection options

### Ways to prevent injuries

The best way to prevent hearing loss is to eliminate or reduce the exposure to the sources of noise. For example:

- ◆ Working as far from noisy equipment, such as compressors and generators, as possible
- ◆ Placing a noise barrier between the worker and equipment
- ◆ Minimizing time of exposure to noise sources

If elimination or reduction of noise sources is not possible, hearing protection is usually the most practical way to reduce workers’ exposure to noise. As their employer you must ensure they:

- ◆ Use their hearing protection
- ◆ Are provided annual hearing tests to identify hearing loss before it becomes severe
- ◆ Are trained on the hazards of noise exposure

**Remember, hearing loss is permanent.**

If your workers can’t hear well, they can also be in danger on the job from other hazards.