**Hearing Conservation Overview**

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**Chat Questions & Answers**

**Q: Do sound level meters need to be professionally calibrated?**

**A:** They are required to be calibrated annually by the manufacturer or other authorized company. In addition, they should be calibrated by the user before each use using a handheld calibration device. These devices also have to be calibrated at least annually (essentially calibrating the calibrator).

**Q: How does OSHA feel about Bluetooth hearing protection muffs (that play music) in environments where the noise is above 90dB?**

**A:** In most cases such devices are not considered hearing protection and do not meet the standard. Note, however, that a 1987 OSHA letter of interpretation contained, in part, the following statement (link follows):

“The United States Postal Service has developed special earmuffs equipped with volume-limited music for use in monotonous high noise jobs to protect employee hearing but at the same time allowing them to enjoy background music. Such devices are in compliance with OSHA regulations if they meet the attenuation requirements relative to the workplace noise levels and their average music output is less than 90 dBA.

In summary, the following compliance direction can be put forward. Use of walkmen in noise environments in excess of Tables G-16 and D-1 is a violation. Use of Walkmen over required ear protection is a violation. Use of Walkmen in occupational noise less than Tables G-16 or D-1 is at managerial discretion unless its use causes a serious safety hazard to warrant issuance of a 5(a)(1). Management and employees must be made aware that Walkmen type devices do pose a hazard to hearing if they are played too loud for any significant length of time, whether on or off the job: The energy, not the esthetics, of sound poses the threat to human hearing sensitivity.”

Based on this interpretation, if the “Bluetooth hearing protection muffs” referenced in the question meet the conditions described in the first paragraph above, they would be acceptable.

<https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/standardinterpretations/1987-04-14>

**Q: So to confirm, employees who had their annual testing and have STS are required to wearing ear plugs etc.?**

**A:** Yes, if the STS is confirmed, hearing protection must be mandatory for the affected employee as long as exposure remains in excess of the Action Level.