

# News Release



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## **US Labor Department's OSHA extends comment period to March 21, 2011, announces stakeholder meeting on noise control interpretation**

**WASHINGTON** – The U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration today announced that it is extending by 90 days the official comment period on the proposed interpretation titled "Interpretation of OSHA's Provisions for Feasible Administrative or Engineering Controls of Occupational Noise," which was published in the *Federal Register* on Oct. 19. Interested parties are encouraged to submit comments by March 21, 2011.

The agency also announced that it will hold a stakeholder meeting before the end of the comment period to listen to the concerns of businesses and workers about the proposed noise interpretation.

"We're very eager to get input from those parties who would be affected by this proposed interpretation," said Dr. David Michaels, assistant secretary of labor for occupational safety and health. "We have by no means completed our review of the issue and seek to make an informed decision that is in the best interest of protecting workers, yet sensitive to the operating changes businesses would need to make."

Thousands of workers every year continue to suffer from preventable hearing loss due to high workplace noise levels. Since 2004, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has reported that more than 125,000 workers have suffered significant, permanent hearing loss. In 2008 alone, BLS reported 22,000 hearing loss cases.

Responding to continuing high levels of hearing loss among employees in the nation's workplaces, the notice proposed to make enforcement of the hearing conservation standard consistent with enforcement of other OSHA standards by clarifying the term "feasible administrative or engineering controls" as used in OSHA's general industry and construction occupational noise exposure standards.

OSHA's current enforcement policy for noise exposures less than 100 decibels has not accurately reflected the noise standard's requirements that feasible engineering and administrative controls be used as the primary means of reducing noise exposure. Instead, OSHA has allowed many employers to rely upon a hearing conservation program, including the use of hearing protectors such as ear plugs.

"There is sufficient evidence that hearing protection alone cannot prevent workers from suffering preventable hearing loss," said Michaels. "Easily applied administrative or engineering controls can and must be used to protect workers. There are plenty of employers out there who play by the rules and want to do the right thing, and we're hopeful we can work with them to craft a policy that's good for all."

Comments may be submitted online at <http://www.regulations.gov>. Alternatively, individuals may mail or deliver comments (three copies) to the OSHA Docket Office, Docket No. OSHA-2010-0032, U.S. Department of Labor, Room N-2625, 200 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20210. Or, submissions not longer than 10 pages may be faxed to 202-693-1648.

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to assure these conditions for America's working men and women by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education and assistance. For more information, visit <http://www.osha.gov>. # # #

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