

# OH&S BULLETIN

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## NOISE-INDUCED HEARING LOSS IN THE FISH HARVESTING INDUSTRY

Fish harvesters are exposed to many occupational hazards on board fishing vessels. One hazard that has the potential to cause noise-induced hearing loss is prolonged exposure to high noise levels. The engines on a fishing vessel are the most significant noise source and noise levels on vessels increase with an increase in engine RPM.

According to WorkplaceNL injury statistics, in Newfoundland and Labrador, between 2011 and 2017, four out of every 100 accepted claims were hearing loss related. Fish harvesting is one of the top two industry classes of hearing-loss related claims among workers.

Fish Harvesters filed close to 9% of the workers' compensation claims for hearing-loss claims in the province. Fishing vessel skippers and fishers were the most frequent of the ten occupations found with hearing loss claims.

Noise is any sound that is loud or unpleasant or that causes a disturbance. It is one of the most common occupational health hazards.

Noise becomes a problem when people have to raise their voices to be heard or when they experience ringing in their ears after being exposed to a noisy environment.

The risk to hearing from noise

exposure depends on how loud the noise is and the length of exposure time.

In this province, there is an occupational health and safety regulatory requirements where the average daily exposure to noise must not exceed 85 dBA over an eight hour workday, 40 hour work week. No exposure above 140 dBA is permitted.

The higher the noise level, the shorter the exposure time required before damage to the ear can occur.



### *Acknowledgements*

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## Why are Fish Harvesters at Risk?

In 2018, research examining noise exposure of small scale fisheries in Newfoundland and Labrador identified propulsive engines and auxiliary machinery as the main steady state noise sources on fishing vessels. Noise was beyond the recommended levels for most spaces on the vessels included in the study.

The combination of high noise levels and prolonged exposure on fishing vessels is thought to be responsible for noise-induced hearing loss.

## Examples of Noise

Noise can change over time and range from continuous or intermittent. The noise of an engine is relatively constant while intermittent noise can include a mix of noisy and quiet periods. Short, loud bursts of noise lasting for less than a second are known as impulse or impact noise. A blast is an example of an impact noise.

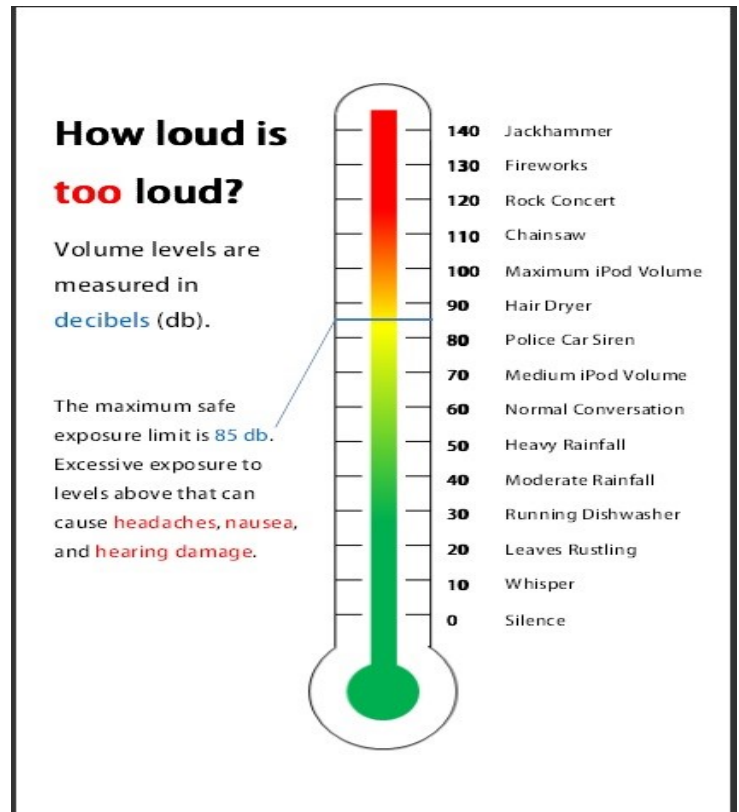
## How does noise exposure impact my health?

The main health effect of exposure to noise is loss of hearing. This may be gradual or result from a one-time exposure to a loud burst of noise. Noise-induced hearing loss is irreversible and will continue to worsen with exposure. Over time, certain activities are impacted or restricted such as having a conversation and enjoying music.

Noise can also have other effects on health such as stress on the cardiovascular system which can lead to dizziness and high blood pressure.

### **RULE of THUMB**

**If you have to yell to be heard, your environment is too loud and you are at risk of hearing loss**



## How can I protect myself?

- ◇ Understand where the noise is coming from and determine if the volume of the noise exceeds a safe level.
- ◇ Control the noise at the source – select equipment with low noise levels, isolate engine rooms and other sources of noise with sound insulation, enclosures, etc.
- ◇ Modify the amount of time you spend around sources of noise.
- ◇ Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) like ear muffs or ear plugs to protect your hearing; even for short duration tasks.
- ◇ If you are concerned that you may have hearing loss, make an appointment to have your hearing tested.

