

Hearing Protection: Control Noise, Check the Fit

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v1.0 | Reviewed October 6, 2026 | Discussion + field checks

Why this matters

The same tool can create different exposure when we move indoors, work longer or add another noisy operation. Earplugs in a pocket provide no protection, and wearing them does not prove that their fit is adequate.

Objective: Identify today's noise controls and show how your selected hearing protection will be checked.

Key hazards or failure points

Changed noise or duration; missing enclosures or barriers; poorly fitted protectors; incompatible PPE; communication that requires removing protection.

Practical controls

- Use the approved quieter method, equipment or noise controls first. Keep required enclosures and barriers in place. Plan noisy work to reduce exposure to nearby crews.
- Have the person responsible for noise assessment confirm that the assessment covers today's task and duration. Use the hearing protection selected for that exposure; do not choose by package rating alone.
- Fit and wear protection according to its instructions and training. Arrange communication and warning methods that work with protection in place. Move to a safe, quiet area to resolve fit problems.

Verify It in the Field

Before exposure, the leader checks the control setup against the current assessment. Ask what changed: equipment, enclosure, task time or nearby work. Refer unassessed changes for evaluation.

A trained checker observes each worker fitting the selected protector with the other PPE they will wear. Inspect reusable devices for damage and seal interference. Use the actual manufacturer's fitting checks; do not expose someone to loud noise as a test.

Confirm the adequacy of protection through the employer's evaluation. NIOSH recommends individual quantitative fit testing; a visual check cannot measure the protection a worker receives. Record the device, assessment reference, fit-check result and required follow-up.

Stop and reassess

Pause affected work for failed noise controls, unresolved fit, missing protection or communication that cannot be maintained safely. Report ringing, muffled hearing or other changes promptly and arrange appropriate evaluation. Correct the control or selection, recheck and rebrief before exposure resumes.

Ask the crew

1. What could make today's noise exposure different from the assessment?
2. How will we know the protection fits with our other PPE?
3. How will we communicate and get help without removing protection in noise?

Before exposure: control the noise and confirm the protection suits the person and task.

Sources: OSHA 1910.95; 1926.52/.101; NIOSH Publication 2025-104.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance, references, supervisor check and attendance record accompany this talk.