



Tractor Talks

Noise Exposure

Tips for Talking

- **Plan ahead.** Be familiar and comfortable with the topic.
- **Make it relevant.** Include related tasks and work areas or events.
- **Involve your workers.** Ask questions that lead to participation. See suggestions under "Discussion Drivers."

What went wrong?

December 14, 5:45am

John had helped out on his family's Christmas tree farm since he was a youngster and had started using a chainsaw when he was a teenager. One morning last year, during the "choose and cut" season, the 47 year old awoke with a high pitched, constant ringing in his left ear. After testing, he was told he had tinnitus and accompanying hearing loss. He had no idea his choice to not use hearing protection when cutting trees would eventually lead to such misery. It has been months since the ringing started and his doctor says there is nothing that can be done to make it stop. John has trouble sleeping, suffers from depression and sometimes feels like he "can't take it anymore." **What went wrong?**

Noise on the Farm

Research suggests that farmworkers have significantly higher rates of hearing loss than the general population. In fact, farming is included among occupations with the highest risk for hearing impairment.

Tractors, harvesters, silage blowers, chain saws, skid-steer loaders, and grain dryers, are just some of the sources of noise on a farm. Studies suggest that lengthy exposure to these noises have resulted in noise-induced hearing loss in farmworkers of all ages, including teenagers. While hearing loss is not as dramatic as an injury from a tractor overturn or machine entanglement, it is permanent. In addition to hearing loss, regular and prolonged exposure to noise can also lead to other physical symptoms (tinnitus, inability to sleep, dizziness) and psychological problems (depression, anxiety). Here are some of the warning signs of hearing loss:

- Ringing, buzzing, or whirring in the ears.
- Difficulty understanding normal conversation.
- Turning up the volume on a radio or television when others are able to hear adequately.
- Failing to hear background noises such as a ringing telephone or doorbell.

Protect Your Hearing:

- When working in noisy areas or near loud equipment, use ear plugs or muffs.
- Keep equipment lubricated, properly adjusted, and maintained to help reduce noise.
- Limit the time you spend in noisy areas.
- Put as much distance as possible between the yourself and noisy equipment.
- Tractor cabs can decrease the noise level to the safe range.

Discussion Drivers

1. What factors may have contributed to John's damaged hearing?
2. Who else is impacted by John's tinnitus, hearing loss and other side effects?
3. What is your greatest concern related to your job and environmental hazards?

For more information on Occupational Noise Exposure visit: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/noisehearingconservation/index.html>

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