

Quick Reference Table: Ontario Workplace Noise Limits

Legal basis: Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) & O. Reg. 381/15 – Noise ^{1 2}

Maximum Allowable Noise Exposure (No Hearing Protection Applied)

Average Noise Level (dBA)	Maximum Daily Exposure Time	Supervisor Action Required
80	Up to 16 hours (best practice)	Monitor; no controls required yet
85 (Legal limit)	8 hours	Assess noise levels; controls required if exceeded
88	4 hours	Reduce exposure time or apply controls
91	2 hours	Engineering/administrative controls required
94	1 hour	Immediate exposure control needed
97	30 minutes	Restrict access; hearing protection likely required
100	15 minutes	High-risk exposure; strong controls mandatory

- Based on **Lex,8 = 85 dBA** and a **3 dB exchange rate** (every +3 dBA halves allowed time) ^{3 4}
- Measurements must be taken **without hearing protection** ⁵
- Hearing protection **does not increase the legal exposure limit**; it is a control measure only ⁶

¹<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/150381>

²<https://www.ontario.ca/document/guide-noise-regulation-under-occupational-health-and-safety-act/regulation>

³<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/150381>

⁴<https://www.ohcow.on.ca/occupational-illness/exposures/noise/>

⁵<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/150381>

⁶<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/150381>

Hearing Conservation Program: Supervisor Checklist

Use this checklist when noise **may exceed 85 dBA Lex,8**.

1. Noise Identification & Assessment

- Tasks/equipment reviewed for loud noise
- Formal noise measurements completed (dosimeter or sound level meter)
- Lex,8 calculated for worker exposure (equivalent continuous sound level normalized to 8 hours)
- Measurements taken **without Hearing Protection Devices (HPDs)**

2. Apply the Hierarchy of Controls (must be applied in this order)

Elimination, Substitution, Engineering Controls

- Quieter equipment selected where possible
- Enclosures, barriers, mufflers, or absorptive materials installed
- Preventive maintenance completed to reduce noise

Administrative / Work Practice Controls

- Exposure time limited (job rotation, scheduling)
- High-noise tasks scheduled with fewer workers present
- Safe work procedures address noise hazards

3. Hearing Protection Devices (HPDs)

(Used when higher-order controls cannot reduce exposure below 85 dBA)

- Appropriate HPDs selected based on noise levels
- Manufacturer attenuation and limitations reviewed
- Proper fit ensured (multiple sizes/types available)
- HPDs maintained and replaced as required

4. Training & Instruction

Workers who use HPDs must be trained on:

- When hearing protection is required
- Correct fitting and use
- Limitations of the device
- Inspection, cleaning, and storage

5. Signage & Area Control

- Warning signs posted at entrances to areas **regularly exceeding 85 dBA**
- Signs visible and understandable to all workers

6. Program Review & Documentation

- Noise assessments kept on file
- Control measures reviewed when equipment/processes change
- Worker concerns investigated promptly
- JHSC or health & safety representative consulted

Supervisor “Red Flags” (Immediate Action)

- Workers must shout to communicate in the workplace
- Ringing in ears reported by workers after shifts
- HPDs worn continuously just to tolerate normal work
- New equipment installed without noise assessment completed