



March 5 — That's Not Hearing Protection

Contractor was working on sealing the cement floors, I saw that he was wearing ear buds and not ear plugs.

I told him he needed to remove his ear buds and put his hearing protection in.

A contractor was sealing cement floors while wearing earbuds instead of approved hearing protection. From a distance, it may have looked like he had something in his ears, but earbuds are not designed to protect against occupational noise exposure.

Earbuds are not PPE.
Hearing damage doesn't heal.
If it's not rated protection, it's not protection.

Industrial equipment produces sustained noise levels that can permanently damage hearing over time. Earbuds may reduce some sound, but they are not rated or tested for hearing protection. They also introduce distraction, reducing awareness of alarms, equipment movement, and verbal warnings.

Hearing loss doesn't happen all at once. It builds shift after shift. By the time you notice it, the damage is already done.

This wasn't about not knowing noise exists. It was about convenience. Something felt close enough to protection.

But close enough doesn't protect your hearing.

Hazards

- Permanent hearing loss
- Tinnitus (ringing in ears)
- Reduced situational awareness
- Missed alarms or warnings
- Increased risk of secondary injury due to distraction

Stats

- Approximately 22 million U.S. workers are exposed to hazardous noise levels annually.
- Noise-induced hearing loss is one of the most common occupational illnesses.
- Exposure to noise above 85 decibels over time can cause permanent hearing damage.
- Hearing damage is cumulative and irreversible.

Humans at Work

Hearing damage doesn't feel urgent. There's no sharp pain, no instant consequence. The brain pushes it to the future. "It's fine for now" becomes the mindset. At the same time, music pulls part of your attention away from the job. Even if you think you're aware, you're dividing focus. Noise damage builds slowly, and distraction happens quietly.

The hard part is you don't notice what you're losing until it's gone. Future you will wish past you had taken it seriously. By the time the damage catches up, there's no rewind button.

Pause and Think

- Are you wearing approved, rated hearing protection?
- Can you still hear alarms and equipment movement?
- Are you choosing convenience over compliance?