



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
MS AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTRY
EXPERIMENT STATION

MAFES DAWG TRACKS

Music is an amazing thing ... it can help express what you don't have words for yourself and even bring back a flood of memories from days gone by. With the ability of phones where we can literally have any song available to listen to at the tip of our finger, it's easy for the likes of music and podcast to become a distraction and take our focus away from work tasks at hand and the surrounding environment. A large portion of working safely is being aware of your surroundings.

Not only do you need your eyes to be aware of your surroundings, your sense of hearing also plays an important role. Some job tasks should not allow headphones or earbuds to be worn. If operating equipment or working around animals, this is especially true. You need to be able to hear surrounding sounds and warning signals, for example:

- Is a bearing going out on equipment or something making an unusual noise?
- Do you hearing the sound of hooves running up from behind or animals making unusual sounds?
- Is a co-worker hollering "Watch out!"

Not only is hearing important in outdoor work areas, but office and lab environments too. Headphones or earbuds can prevent you from hearing things like:

- Fire alarms or necessary public address systems.
- Communication from adjacent employees.
- Incidents happening in another room or down the hallway that could affect you (good – somebody brought cake to share, or bad – fighting or gun shots).

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More of us are using personal listening devices and headphones in noisier environments. We may turn up the volume even louder to drown out the noise we don't like for more of what we do like. But this sometimes creates potentially dangerous decibel levels increasing the risk of hearing lose more than what was a hazard from just the original noise.

Why are earbuds particularly dangerous to hearing?

They are essentially tiny speakers that funnel music straight into the ear canal. Yet most earbuds are low quality, incapable of blocking out ambient noise. They also tend to transmit bass poorly. Both of these factors lead listeners to turn up the volume even more. Outside-the-ear headphones are a better option, as unlike earbuds which deliver music directly into the ear, they provide somewhat of a buffering space between the music and the ear canal.

Hearing advocates are pressing for people to turn down the volume and go with what is known as the **60/60 Rule**. No listening device should ever be used at full volume. Instead, the volume should be kept at no higher than 60 percent of the maximum and that it should be used for no more than 60 minutes at a time.

Days, whether running equipment or sitting at a desk, can get long and music definitely helps with that monotony. So maybe the solution is something like an in-cab radio or external speakers that allows hearing the music & sounds in the surrounding environment. As a supervisor, decide what job tasks need complete focus with zero distractions or is there a safe compromise and communicate this with your workers if it is an issue.

Sources:

<https://www.hear-it.org>

<https://www.healthyhearing.com/report/52503-Headphones-when-hearing-danger-is-closer-than-you-think>