Safety and Use of Personal Headphones and Earplugs for Everyday Use.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the government’s watchdog agency for all matters related to safety in the workplace, communities as well as college campuses nationwide, has commented on safety and the use of personal headphones and or earplugs. OSHA discourages their use in the workplace because they prevent the wearer from receiving auditory cues about the surrounding environment and because they are ineffective at preventing noise-related damage to the ears.

Inadequate Hearing Protection

In the OSHA pocket booklet “Protecting Yourself from Noise in Construction,” the Occupational Safety and Health Administration comments directly on the use of the headphones and earplugs.

Equipment in Motion

Wearing personal headphones in the workplace also presents a hazard for the operation of moving equipment such as golf carts; security vehicle’s; bikes; buses; etc. especially as it relates to our college campus. Verbal directions or even orders for an emergency stop can be obscured by the use of personal headphones or earplugs.

Distraction

Personal headphones present a distraction to the person wearing them. In a high-risk situation such as; fire or drills; active shooter or something as simple as giving directions headphones and or earplugs can become a distraction. On this Campus we have a lot of construction going on in and outside of several buildings. A construction site has high noise levels and personal headphones will cause such distractions that can lead to injury or death should a student faculty or staff member become trapped or crushed by any moving equipment.
Teens and Hearing Loss

Dr. Sharon A. Sandridge, PhD, Director of Clinical Services in Audiology at Cleveland Clinic says the big problem is that many devices allow outputs to go much further than 85 dBs and listeners, especially younger listeners, don’t realize the long-term damaging effects. “Twelve to 15 percent of teenagers have hearing loss to some degree”, says Dr. Sandridge. “Early exposure to noise results in inner ear damage which is permanent damage and may not be experienced until later on-when it is too late to prevent it. As a parent, faculty or staff member, do you often find yourself asking teenagers to remove their headphones so you can speak to them? Today, 1-in-5 teens has some form of hearing loss-a rate about 30% higher than it was in the 1980s and 1990s-which many experts believe is due, in part, to the increased use of headphones and earplugs.

Dr. Sharon A. Sandridge makes some suggestion on hearing prevention.

- Balance volume, length of listening.
- “Eighty percent volume for a maximum of 90 minutes is the general rule of thumb”
- “It really is an inverse relationship between how long and how loud. If you are listening for an amount of time longer than 90 minutes, volume should be reduced so that the longer you listen, the lower the volume”.
- Another common practice is to observe the 60/60 rule: Listen at 60 percent volume for about an hour at a time and then give our ears a BREAK.

James E. Foy, DO, an osteopathic pediatrician from Vallejo, California explains “What are the signs of hearing loss”? “The type of hearing loss due to headphone use is typically gradual, cumulative and without obvious warning signs,” a hearing test and a medical examination are the only way to truly diagnose hearing damage. However, If you or if you know anyone experiencing any of the following symptoms, Dr. Foy recommends a visit to a physician immediately.

- Ringing, roaring, hissing or buzzing in the ear.
• Difficulty understanding speech in noisy places or places with poor acoustics.
• Muffled sounds and a feeling that your ear is plugged.

Unfortunately, the type of hearing loss caused by over exposure to very loud noise is irreversible, so let us all make prevention paramount!

Thank You,
Hope Jarvis Training Officer of the
Mercer County Community College and Safety Department