ASSE Member Helps Win First Safe-In-Sound Award

Handling water sanitation can be louder than it seems. There are pumps, engines, trucks, fans and a plethora of other sound sources that can damage a worker's hearing. In Ohio, facilities are not required to follow OSHA regulations for hearing loss prevention programs, but Connie Muncy, ASSE member and safety officer at the Montgomery County Water Services plant in Ohio, has implemented a program that not only complies with the regulations, but also exceeds them. Her work earned the plant's first NIOSH Safe-In-Sound award in the Safety Service category.

Muncy says NIOSH was particularly impressed by the plant's internal safety intranet site. This site, accessible anywhere at any hour of the day, gave employees knowledge about what safety equipment they would need for each job. Unlike many professions, employees at the water plant are not fixed in a specific occupation. Maintenance, vehicle repair, field officers, water reduction plant operators and inspectors often cover for each other. This makes it hard to learn specific regulations, so the site allows employees to know what hearing protection equipment they need in different areas of work.

"Because your duties are so widely varied...it's easy for people to not understand what the danger is," Muncy says.

The facility also uses signs to label areas that have particularly damaging sound, such as near fans or pumps. These signs also tell employees what gear they should be using to protect their hearing. Using new engineering controls, such as machines that produce less noise, is also part of the facility's current and future plans, Muncy says. "We're trying to take the guesswork out of it."

Muncy also involved the facility's employees in identifying sound hazards. For example, allowing employees to use noise monitors to identify hearing hazards and learn about them made the project important to employees as well. They were able to learn about the hazards that existed in their own workplace.

Muncy also outlined the cost of hearing impairment as part of the hands-on approach to motivate employees to be part of this process. Instead of telling employees to comply because it is the law or because it is good for you, employees learned that to live with hearing impairment means buying a special telephone, a hearing aid, a vibrating alarm bed and other things to get through the workday. Muncy says this behavior-based communication gave employees a sense of what this would cost them physically and financially and gave them a sense of the dangers they faced. "We want employees to initiate the buy-in themselves," she says.

If an employee ever loses his/her hearing, Muncy looks not only at the environment in which s/he works but also at the chemicals that may exist in that area and the employee's habits at home. Certain ototoxic chemicals in the workplace and medications can damage hearing, if only temporarily, and defining that in the workplace can be important for every employee. But what an employee does at home can compound with...
tified professional ergonomists and Humantech staff members. From the field of finalists, two honorable mentions and one first-place winner will be selected. The finalists will be notified by early November and the winning photos and submissions will be posted on the Humantech website in early December.

Last year’s Find-It Fix-It Challenge winner, Gerdaun Ameristeel-Charlotte’s brick chute design, was featured on pp. 22-25 of Professional Safety’s June 2009 issue.

PREVENTIVE CARE
Organizations Launch National Campaign to Stay Healthy
Department of Health and Human Services, the Ad Council and Sesame Workshop (the nonprofit education organization behind Sesame Street) have partnered to launch a national public service advertising campaign to encour-

work habits to break the threshold and damage hearing. When at home and doing things such as mowing the grass or working with loud, large machinery, employees should practice the same safety practices they do at work to protect their ears, Muncy says.

Muncy says she was fortunate that her director bought into her ideas early, as it made the process of earning approval much easier. While the traditional ideas of “we want to protect our workers” was indeed part of the proposal, the fact is the company can save a lot of money from workers’ compensation fees to use elsewhere. Getting management to understand that was a key selling point.

The facility also plans to implement new technology. One example of this is ProEars earphones. These devices block out louder, damaging noises while letting human speech frequencies pass, protecting ears from higher decibel levels. During a trial of this technology, employees really loved it and the facility plans on getting more, Muncy says.

Communicating to employees the dangers of hearing impairment and getting management’s support in the plan have helped the facility get the recognition it now has. Muncy plans to attend conferences and tour other water facilities to help them meet this same level of hearing protection. She says the only way to counter the “silent epidemic” is to be the leader that creates the new approaches necessary to counter it and communicate with each other. “Communication is definitely number one,” Muncy says.

families and children to take steps to protect themselves from the H1N1 flu virus and continue to practice healthy habits.

The campaign focuses on providing accurate information about how to practice healthy habits and highlights simple, everyday actions that lead to staying healthy and keeping germs away. Sesame Workshop produced a television public service announcement featuring Sesame Street characters explaining the importance of habits such as hand washing, avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth, and sneezing into the bend of your arm to prevent the spread of germs. It also encourages audiences to visit the CDC website (www.cdc.gov) to learn more information.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AHMP Expands Online Course Library
More than 200 environmental, health, safety and security (EHS&ES) courses have been added to Alliance of Hazardous Material Professionals’ (AHMP)