

Workshop Safety

The Importance of Adequate Hearing Protection

Many woodworkers do an excellent job of protecting their eyes from flying debris and their lungs from the hazards of sawdust...then pay little or no attention to protecting their ears from the often loud, abusive noises produced by certain woodworking machines. Not good !

Unlike most “visible” workshop hazards, constant exposure to the high frequencies of power woodworking tools and machines can be every bit as dangerous...and often produce hearing problems that can remain virtually undetectable for years. That’s because the damaging effects of these high frequencies are cumulative; each prolonged exposure will affect your hearing microscopically. As a result, hearing loss is gradual and more often than not, goes unnoticed until it’s too late.

High frequencies are chiefly generated by high-speed motors. The Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) requires that businesses limit exposure time to power equipment in relation to the level of frequency. In other words, by federal standards, the higher the frequency of the sound, the shorter the time you should be exposed to it. And although home workshops are not regulated by these government standards, it’s an important rule of thumb to follow for any machining operation.

Operations such as routing, shaping, jointing and planing are particularly damaging to your hearing. For example, a hand-held router motor operates at 18,000 to 25,000 rpms. Comparatively, the MARK V motor operates at 3,450 rpms. And, since routing operations often require very close attention, your head is usually much closer to the screaming motor than it should be. So, not only does the router motor expose you to ultra-high, damaging frequencies, it does so within far closer proximity to your ears than most other woodworking operations.

Hearing Protectors are the safest, most effective solution to this problem. A good set of these Protectors will only partially muffle the surrounding sounds, screening-out the high, hazardous sounds first and allowing you to carry on a normal conversation while saving your hearing from potential harm. Effective protectors are designed to do just this. That’s because it’s unwise to completely block off your hearing, which could also block out warnings or danger signals.

Cotton or wax offer little protection from the most damaging frequencies and can be hazardous to the delicate inner structure when they’re stuffed into place. As a standard feature of your workshop, “headphone-type” hearing protectors can be shared, while cotton or wax cannot. Plastic protectors are lighter and won’t conduct electricity. Two great reasons why we recommend their use with any high-speed woodworking operation...especially in garage or basement shops where concrete walls will not adequately absorb the sounds of your equipment.

So, in closing, remember that your ears are every bit as important to your continuing health and ability to live a happy, productive life as your eyes and your lungs. Treat them as such !