

EPA Regulations: Sound Improvement

EPA's Office of Air and Radiation has received funding to update hearing protector testing and labeling regulations, which have been pending since 2003. Brad Witt with the Bacou-Dalloz Hearing Safety Group offers his insight into what the new regulations might mean for industry in "What You Need to Hear" at www.hearingportal.com. Says Witt: "For nearly 30 years, the EPA has used the noise reduction rating (NRR) as its yardstick to measure hearing protector effectiveness in reducing noise levels. This current EPA regulation uses idealized laboratory testing to generate the NRR. The proposals under consideration test the hearing protectors under conditions that are less-than-ideal but more reflective of real-world usage." As outlined in "What You Need to Hear," the EPA is considering test methods and rating systems with the following features:

- New testing standards would replace the experimenter-fit method of the previous ANSI standard.

- New ratings would not require de-rating for field use but possibly would include a two-number range that expresses the attenuation expected from proficient users as well as inexperienced users.

- The NRR acronym would possibly be revised to mean noise reduction range.

- This new rating would be subtracted from A-weighted noise levels, not C-weighted as the current NRR requires.

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