



Keep Your Ears Open for Safety!

Distracted working is like distracted driving. If an employee is using earbuds or earphones to listen to music or podcasts, or engage in phone conversations, they may become pre-occupied and neglectful to their surroundings. Critical alarms, sirens, vehicles, machinery, screams, security warnings or threats may be potentially muted.

Wearing earbuds can be especially dangerous in construction, agricultural, traffic, mechanical and industrial industries. But even office, hospitality and retail settings have potential safety risks if employees are not completely focused on the tasks at hand.

It's important for employers to evaluate areas of the workplace which are most impacted by distracted earbud/headphone wearers. Related policies should then be developed, communicated and enforced.

Issues to consider include:

- Earbuds or headphones may not be worn in place of hearing protection.
- Earbuds or headphones may not be worn while operating or near machinery, industrial trucks or motor vehicles.
- If authorized by the employer, earbuds or headphones may only be worn while employees are stationary in a controlled environment free of potential hazards.
- If authorized by the employer, use of one earbud or single ear headset may be an acceptable compromise.
- Corded ear buds or headphones must always be prohibited in areas where cords can become caught in machinery.
- For hearing protection, never listen at 100 percent volume. Follow the 60:60 rule: listen at 60% of the maximum volume for no more than 60 minutes a day.



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