Current Findings: Occupational Hearing Loss

In the United States, over 11% of the U.S. working population has hearing difficulty. About 24% of the hearing difficulty among U.S. workers is caused by occupational exposures. Around 22 million of these workers are exposed to hazardous noise each year.\(^1\)

Occupational Hearing Loss (OHL) can occur when workers are exposed to loud noise. Noise is considered loud (hazardous) when it reaches 85 decibels or higher, or if a person has to raise his/her voice to speak with someone 3 feet away. Most U.S. workers exposed to loud noise on the job are required by government regulations to receive annual hearing tests.

In 2009, the NIOSH Occupational Hearing Loss Surveillance Project was created after a method was developed for obtaining large numbers of worker hearing tests. NIOSH epidemiologist Elizabeth Masterson, PhD, CPH, COHC, in collaboration with 18 data partners, collected nearly 9 million hearing tests.\(^2\) Analysis produced estimates of the number of workers with OHL for each U.S. Industry and examined the risks.
