DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
BUREAU OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY
2300 E STREET NW
WASHINGTON DC 20372-5300

IN REPLY REFER TO

Mar 15 2007

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMANDER, NAVY MEDICINE EAST
COMMANDER, NAVY MEDICINE WEST
COMMANDER, NAVY MEDICINE NATIONAL CAPITAL AREA
COMMANDER, NAVY MEDICINE SUPPORT COMMAND

SUBJECT: Improved Hearing Conservation Program Efforts

Reference: (a) Technical Manual NEHC – TM 6260.99-2

Enclosure: (1) Best Practice Guidelines for Hearing Conservation Program Management

Recent Congressional and Department of Defense interest have been directed at prevention of noise-induced hearing loss in the military. In 2005 The National Academy of Sciences recommended that the military strengthen its hearing loss prevention efforts. It is Navy Medicine's role to ensure that supported commanders are aware of the status of their command's Hearing Conservation Programs (HCP) per the reporting requirements contained in reference (a). Enclosure (1) provides guidelines to assist Bureau of Medicine HCP Managers in achieving this goal.

Navy Medicine point of contact is CDR David McMillan, MC, USN, Occupational Medicine Program Manager at (202) 762-3477 or DSN 762-3477.

D. C. ARTHUR

Best Practice Guidelines for
Hearing Conservation Program Management

Effective Hearing Conservation Program (HCP) management requires detailed involvement and oversight. Program managers are encouraged to use this guide as a standardized framework to review their programs and attain reduced Significant Threshold Shift (STS) rates for each of their supported commands. There are four key elements to laying the foundation for successful HCP management. These key elements consist of a comprehensive knowledge base, identifying the customers, establishing effective communication and knowing when to take targeted intervention.

1. Comprehensive Knowledge Base.

a. Introduction: To establish and maintain an effective HCP, managers must possess a comprehensive understanding of their responsibilities and services they are expected to provide. This includes in-depth knowledge of all pertinent instructions, sources of information and mastery of the tools of the trade to include operation and trouble-shooting of the Defense Occupational Environmental Health Readiness System Hearing Conservation (DOEHRS-HC).

b. Instructions: All pertinent instructions are listed below and are available in electronic form. Copies of the instructions are available through a variety of archives but also may be located as links via the Navy Environmental Health Center (NEHC) Hearing Conservation Program web site http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil/occmed/index_audiology.htm

- DODI 6055.12
- OPNAVINST 5100.19 series
- OPNAVINST 5100.23 series
- NEHC TM 6260.51.99.2
- MCO 6260.1 series

c. Training: It is an incontrovertible requirement that all personnel entered in the HCP undergo both initial and annual training. There are numerous audio, video and print sources available that effectively communicate the essential elements of the Navy's HCP. For guidance on available material contact the Hearing Conservation Team at the Navy Environmental Health

Center. At a minimum, seven topics must be addressed by annual training:

- Physical and psychological effects of noise;
- Recognition of hazardous noise levels;
- Purpose of audiometric testing;
- Selection, fitting, use and care of hearing protection;
- Responsibilities of supervisors and individuals in the Program;
- Awareness of the hazards of non-occupational noise;
- The impact of hearing loss on mission performance and fitness for duty.

d. DOEHRS-HC: Program managers are expected to serve as the first point of contact for troubleshooting and data integrity issues and, as a result, must have a comprehensive understanding of this software application as well as all associated hardware. A list of core resources for DOEHRS-HC is available from the Navy Environmental Health Center (NEHC) Hearing Conservation Program web site at http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil/occmed/index_audiology.htm, as are a wide range of tools for troubleshooting common problems:

- DOEHRS-HC User's Manual
- DOEHRS-HC practical exam
- DOEHRS-HC Tutorial
- DOEHRS-HC & DR Structured Training Program

Miscellaneous resources can be found on the NEHC Occupational Environmental Medicine website at: http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil/occmed/index.htm

e. DOEHRS-DR: The DR is the DOD-mandated warehouse for all hearing test information. Standard reports are available to assist program managers in evaluating individual, regional, and Navy-wide program performance. Occupational Audiologists, Regional Hearing Conservation Program Mangers and users must have an active account and make frequent, effective use of this resource. Account applications can be made at: https://doehrswww.apgea.army.mil/dohrsdr/. Standard reports available within the DR include:

- Compliance reports: Provide information on each supported command's compliance with annual testing requirements.

- Positive Significant Threshold Shift (STS) reports: Provide data on rates of STS on annual, first, and second follow-up testing; delinquency with regards to follow-up testing requirements; new cases of permanent threshold shifts (PTS); and reference audiograms revised during prescribed ranges.
- Records Received reports: Provide productivity data for each supported testing site within a specific area of responsibility. Program managers are able to track data uploads to the data repository for each testing site.

f. Oracle Discoverer: Ad Hoc reporting tool for the development of user specific reports. Requests for unique reports not available in the standard reports of the Data Repository may be made to the Audiology staff of NEHC. Currently available specialized reports include:

- Detailed information on data uploads by user and testing site.
- Tracking of known erroneous data elements for ensuring data integrity.
- Customized testing compliance and outcome metrics

2. Identifying the Customer.

Effective program management demands a thorough understanding of the HCP environment, i.e., knowing those whom you serve, external customers, as well as those who support you, internal customers.

a. External Customers: The ultimate customer is the individual enrolled in the HCP. However, identifying a primary point of contact for each external customer group is critical. Command Safety Officers are the primary sources for identifying personnel to be enrolled in their hearing conservation program. They supply rosters of those to be included in the HCP. This roster becomes the denominator for calculating compliance metrics. It is important to maintain a directory of the name, phone, command, Unit Identification Code (UIC), and e-mail address of each unit's safety officer, and to update that directory not less than quarterly.

b. Internal Customers. A close and collaborative relationship with the Occupational Health team is critical in ensuring an effective program:

- Industrial Hygienist works closely with the command's Safety Officer to identify and abate noise hazardous areas and personnel at risk in the various workspaces at a command;
- Occupational Health Nurse often serves as a primary point of contact for commands with populations receiving occupational health services;
- Occupational Health Physician is a primary source of referrals for occupational hearing loss.

3. Effective Communication.

Effective, regular communication facilitates the understanding of the program manager's role as the hearing conservation subject matter expert. It is critical to advertise services and resources available to all customer categories. Effective interaction strategies assist in achieving executable hearing conservation workload, maximizing productivity and minimizing employee time away from work. Ultimately, collegially-derived strategies will result in a focused team approach to preventing occupational noise-induced hearing loss. Communication tools available to facilitate effective communication include:

a. Site Visits: Site visits are critically important; they put a face on the services provided. A quarterly visit to supported commands is an effective tool for stimulating hearing conservation workload and command compliance with hearing conservation requirements and garnering a personal understanding of issues faced at each HCP testing site.

b. E-mail groups: For large programs, e-mail groups (Outlook Distribution Lists) for the specific customer populations are quite useful. Examples include: "Testing Sites," "Air Wings," "Shore Commands," etc. These allow the program manager to efficiently forward information on a timely basis. Information should include:

- Availability of hearing conservation services, such as safety training, program reviews, record reviews, site visits, and availability of mobile testing services.
- Objective performance metrics for supported commands: This information provides feedback to the primary point of contact on the current hearing "health" of their program. Note: When sharing specific program metrics, make certain it is made available only to those with a need to know.
- Software upgrade announcements.

c. Inter-Office Shared Electronic Calendars: This tool is useful for regional programs to track resources in real-time. By sharing an electronic calendar among all office staff, each member can view and schedule resources simultaneously. Contact your Information Technology support for more information on setting up and maintaining shared electronic calendars.

d. Electronic Program Evaluation Memo: Sharing objective performance indicators with supported commands provides a non-punitive means to evaluate the "health" of a command's program. An example is provided in attachment A. Objective memo elements include:

- Rate of compliance;
- Rate of STS;
- Mean STS rate for similar commands: This dynamic mean is determined by the average rate of STS for commands with similar exposures. When reporting out the dynamic mean, it is important to include all commands that fit within the specified population. The ultimate goal of the dynamic mean is that each command within a sub-group should strive to perform below the group average.

4. Targeted Intervention.

Targeted intervention provides an efficient and practical set of tools for focusing resources where they are needed. These tools consist of:

- DOEHRS-DR Records Received Reports: This report focuses on data uploads from testing facilities. A monthly examination provides the program manager with information on which testing facilities are compliant with uploading. Managers are able to identify and then contact delinquent sites and intervene to ensure uploads are performed.

- DOEHRS-DR Positive STS Reports: This report is useful in establishing dynamic means and targeting sub-groups within commands that have annual STS rates that exceed the mean or excessive rates due to poor compliance with follow up testing. Information on commands with annual STS rates below the mean are then used as a source for identifying best practices to share with the rest of the group.

- Oracle Discoverer "Bogus Data" Ad Hoc reports: This set of tools can be used to focuses on individuals or groups by region or test site for a variety of issues, e.g., known erroneous data elements. Data might include command UICs such as "99999", "12345", "54321", etc., or erroneous job codes such as "9999". Erroneous data corrupts individual medical record information as well as Navy data and reduces confidence in the reports generated from the DOD database. Thus these reports enable the program manager to intervene and provide additional training to the individual examiner, and identify records that require corrections.

DATE

MEMORANDUM

From: Head, Occupational Audiology Department
To: Hearing Conservation Program Manager, <SUPPORTED COMMAND>

Subj: HEARING CONSERVATION INFORMATION FROM <DATE>

1. We are scheduled to provide (mobile) hearing testing services to your command from <DATE> to <DATE> at <Testing Site>. As a service to our supported commands, we provide current information regarding your rate of significant threshold shift (STS), the average STS rate for like commands, and your rate of compliance.

2. By definition, the rate of STS is calculated by dividing the number of individuals who presented with a significant shift on annual testing by the total number of patients seen annually. Compliance is calculated by dividing the number of annual hearing evaluations performed by the total number enrolled in your hearing conservation program. HCP enrollment numbers are provided by the command point of contact. If the precise number of enrollees is unconfirmed, then the average of all like commands is used to calculate compliance. The numbers for each of these calculations are derived from the Defense Occupational Environmental Health Readiness System Data Repository (DOEHRS-DR).

3. To date, a review of the HC program for your command for <DATE> indicates an STS rate of ____% with compliance at ____%. The average STS rate for similar commands is ____%. Our records indicate ____ individuals currently enrolled in your program.

4. The fundamental goal of all Hearing Conservation Programs is to increase compliance to 100% while decreasing the rate of STS on annual audiograms below the average of like commands. If you have questions regarding this information or would like assistance with your program, please contact our office at (999) 999-9999.

I. T. MORGAN

Attachment A