

Hearing Conservation Program Wins Support Of Fieldcrest Employees

Fieldcrest Mills early recognized a correlation between loss of hearing and noise exposure and determined to protect its employees against the risk of hearing loss due to noise on the job. Because of this, Fieldcrest became one of the first textile companies to have a fully-developed and complete hearing conservation program.

Kenneth R. Baggett, Fieldcrest safety director, said, "The Company's belief in the importance of the program, the extensive planning that went into it and the thorough implementation of the program make it one of the best. This is borne out by the many requests we get from companies in the area for assistance in setting up such a program."

The hearing conservation program includes primarily three phases: the identification of noise levels by areas; audiometric testing of employees; and mandatory wearing of hearing protection in areas identified as hazardous.

Noise Abatement Is Ultimate Solution

In addition, the Engineering Department evaluates high noise level areas and attempts, by the use of engineering techniques, to reduce these high noise levels to a safe limit. This noise abatement aspect of the program is seen as the ultimate solution.

However, such a solution will require much time and work as well as large sums of money. Until the goal of removing the noise hazard can be reached, hearing protective equipment must be used.

Dr. Joseph G. Springer, corporate medical director at Fieldcrest, said of the program, "While we did have difficulty in the beginning because of the problems that heat and humidity created in the wearing of ear muffs we can now say that the program is amazingly well-received by the employees. Thus it has changed from a negative to a very positive program in the eyes of the employees."

The change in the attitude of employees is due primarily to two things. One is the changeover from ear muffs to the more comfortable ear canal caps. The other and most important factor is the growing realization by employees that the program has been established for their benefit and that it is indeed helping them.

Fieldcresters Praise Hearing Program

The reaction of many Fieldcresters to the program is typified in the comments of **Lawrence Rhodes**, head loom fixer in the Bedspread Mill Weave Room.

"I have been in weave rooms 41 years continuously and I didn't think the protection would help me at my age," he said. "I felt it would help save the hearing of the younger people, but it's actually helped mine!"

"My hearing has improved at least 25%. I know it has because I can hear the telephone ring at night from where I sleep. I couldn't hear it six or eight months ago."

Cecil Wilson, a weaver at the Fieldale Towel Mill, has also noticed an improvement in his hearing since wearing hearing protection. "I can hear TV and people's voices better when I get out of the mill now than I used to. I feel like the plugs are saving my hearing. I'm not running any risk from weave room noises," he said.

Mr. Wilson, like several other Fieldcrest employees, has found a use for his ear canal caps outside of the mill. "I am a fan of NASCAR racing and I wear my ear plugs at races. They really help," he said.

Thurman Land, a loom fixer in the Bedspread Mill Weave Room, feels that the hearing program is "definitely a good thing." He has been made aware of the damage that excessive noise can do by the experience of a friend. "I know one boy that was in Vietnam and a shell exploded near his ear. The noise from the shell did damage to his ear," he said.



ESSIE BRANCH
Columbus Towel Mill



EDNA HOPPER
Bedspread Mill