

NEWS

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Center Hosts Forum on Health Views

Inaugural Meeting Draws Participants With Variety of Interests

The Women's Occupational Health Resource Center's Inaugural Forum, co-sponsored by Congresswoman Elizabeth Holtzman and held on February 27, gathered an impressive array of experts in the field of women's occupational health. Current legislative policy statements were announced and clarified at the Forum as well as Holtzman's plans for new legislation to protect the health and rights of women workers.

The Forum attracted an audience of diverse fields of interest: labor representatives, corporate medical directors, feminists, government representatives, and political organizers, gathering out of a concern for the health of the woman worker.

Women's Bureau Support

Keynote speaker of the Forum, **Alexis Herman**, Director of the Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, stressed the Bureau's commitment to the occupational health needs of women and pledged support of WOHRC.

Acknowledging the progress women have made in the past fifty years in entering the paid workforce, Herman expressed concern about the quality of jobs where women work, warning of the many unrecognized hazards in basically segregated female occupations. Stress was also noted as a particular hazard for the many women who face a dual role as worker and housekeeper.

UCBHM Lends Further Support

Rev. Dr. Howard E. Spragg of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries announced an award of an additional \$5,000 to WOHRC to develop material on women's occupational health for use in community and women's groups.

UCBHM, one of the original funding sources for the Center, continues its support of causes which sensitize consciousness about social issues.

EEOC and OSHA Perspectives

Peter Robertson, Director of Policy Implementation, Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, outlined current policy on protective legislation for fertile women in hazardous jobs which places the burden on the employer to justify any discriminatory employment practices based on health or safety risks.

Robertson pointed out that businesses must investigate alternative means to create a safe and healthful work environment before



Speaker **Alexis Herman**, Women's Bureau Director, addressing audience of Inaugural Forum. Other speakers included (left to right) **Jeanne Stelman, Ph.D.**, **Peggy Richardson**, **Odessa Komer**, and (partially in view) **Rev. Dr. Howard Spragg**.

any discriminatory employment rulings can take effect and only if it is proved that they are *imperative* to "business necessity" to ensure the safe and efficient operation of the business. Casual banning would be looked upon with "suspicion."

Peggy Richardson of OSHA's Policy Analysis branch stressed OSHA's commitment to provide protection without depriving women of employment and to provide information to women to help them protect themselves. Richardson stated, "OSHA feels strongly that

(Cont. on page 4)

Protective Equipment Bureau Begins Work

Do you need help in finding the personal protective equipment needed for your job? Not sure of the style or standards your safety equipment should meet? The Women's Occupational Health Resource Center has just developed a **Personal Protective Equipment Information Bureau** to help you find the proper equipment to suit your specific needs, making your work in searching for the right equipment easier and faster.

Equipment Information Provided

If you think you need some advice on the proper fit, use and care of equipment or where to buy what you're looking for, we can provide you with this information. We can also give you the names of companies that make products specially designed for women.

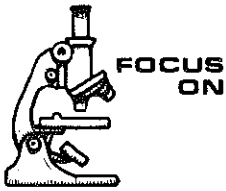
The Bureau is also interested in *your* comments or suggestions about personal

protective equipment. If you are in need of equipment specially designed to meet your needs, the Bureau can send your comments or suggestions to the manufacturers of personal protective equipment to facilitate their development.

Questionnaire Available

A questionnaire for users of personal protective equipment has been developed. The information you could provide us as experts on your job would aid in the understanding of problems with the equipment so they can be designed to fit the needs of workers. Just let us know how many copies of the questionnaire you would like and ask your co-workers if they would like to answer the questionnaire, too.

We encourage you to send your questions, ideas or comments or call us for more information.





• Noise and Noise Contr

Basic Facts and Figures

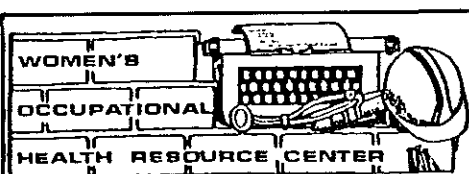
Whether we are at home or at work, we are exposed to noise. Too much noise can damage hearing as well as the rest of the body.

Some Definitions

- Noise:** Unwanted sound.
Audlometer: Instrument used to measure hearing ability.
Decibel (dBA): Unit of sound pressure or intensity.
Frequency: Characteristic of sound that is measured in cycles per second or hertz; high-frequency sounds are shrill and low-frequency sounds are deep.
Hertz (Hz): Unit of frequency, equivalent to 1 cycle per second.
Permanent Noise-Induced Threshold Shift (PNITS): Permanent loss of hearing from noise.
Sound Level Meter: Instrument used to measure noise levels.
Temporary Threshold Shift (TTS): Temporary loss of hearing from noise.

Sound travels through the air in the form of waves. A whistle makes a shrill, high-pitched sound that has a high-frequency sound wave , while a tuba produces a deep, low-frequency sound wave . Frequency is measured in units of cycles (or waves) per second or hertz. Sound pressure or intensity is measured in units called decibels (dBA). 20 dBA is ten times as intense as 10 dBA, 30 dBA is 10 times as intense as 20 dBA and so on. Some examples of decibel levels of certain familiar household noises are:

	Noise Level	Perceived Noise Level
Vacuum cleaner	74dBA	87dBA
Dishwasher	70dBA	82dBA
Garbage disposal	81dBA	93dBA



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Executive Director Jeanne M. Stellman, Ph.D.
Associate Director Deborah Ensign
Research Associate Marsha Kaplan
Librarian Lydia Wohlin
Layout Janet Lugo

Women's Occupational Health Resource Center
 American Health Foundation
 320 East 43rd St.
 New York, N.Y. 10017
 (212) 953-1900

(Subscription information on page 4.)

Effects of a Noisy Environment

An extremely intense and sudden noise can break the eardrum. A hole in the drum will cause a loss in hearing ability. A continuous noise, usually about 80dBA or more, can strain the ear causing a decrease in hearing ability. This decrease is called a Temporary Threshold Shift (TTS) because a sound must be more intense than before for it to be heard. For example, after leaving a noisy room or listening to loud rock music you will notice that you can't hear as well as before. The ear can recover from this loss if allowed to rest. Permanent hearing loss is called a Permanent Noise-Induced Threshold Shift (PNITS) and can occur if the ear can't recover from continuous noise.

Other Effects of Noise

Noise can affect other bodily functions besides hearing, creating stress on the body. This can include increased blood pressure, heart rate and potentially serious illnesses. The way one perceives noise can also cause feelings of annoyance. Studies have been done where annoyance or perceived noise level is measured and is different from the actual decibel level.

Some offices have white or pink noise installed as sound maskers. White or pink noise produces a steady hissing sound and is used to muffle or cover up other noises. Some workers have found these frequencies of noise to be irritating and annoying.

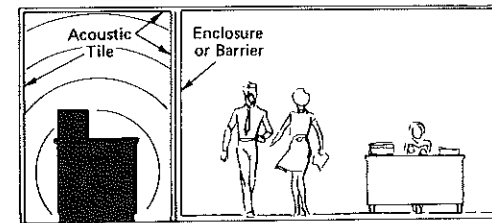
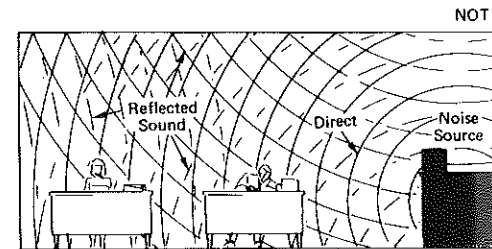
Controlling Exposure to Noise

Most governments have set certain standards for exposure to noise. These standards set a time limit for a certain decibel level. Notice that each 5dBA increase causes the recommended exposure time to decrease by one-half.

Maximum Duration per Day	Sound Level dBA
8 hours	90dBA
4 hours	95dBA
2 hours	100dBA
1 hour	105dBA
½ hour	110dBA
¼ hour or less	115dBA

Noise should be controlled at the source so equipment should be designed to minimize noise. Noisy equipment or processes can also be isolated from other people by walls, soundproof booths or moving it away. As a last resort, ear protection can be used. Ear-muffs are the most effective. They can reduce noise up to 40 dBA. Earplugs should be molded to an individual's ear. A sound level meter is an easy-to-use instrument to measure decibel level. To measure hearing loss, audiometers are used.

Noise in the office environment—or in any workplace—is not a necessary part of the job. It can be eliminated. On this page we show some sources of noise as well as some solutions to the problem. The illustration below, taken from the United Auto Workers Union's excellent *Noise Control Manual* shows some basic principles of reducing noise



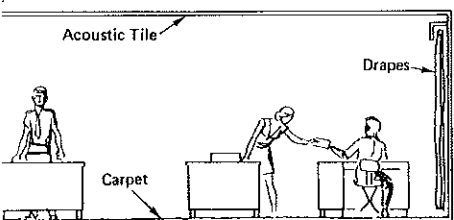
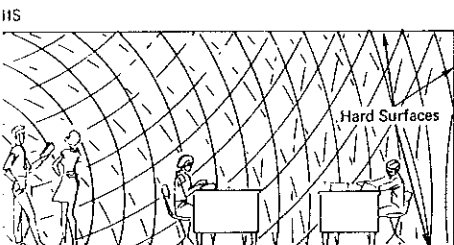
Noise Control c

Noise levels from the addressing machines shown here were measured at 90 dBA, the upper limit for noise exposure during an eight-hour workday. This picture illustrates several aspects of poor noise control design. Some suggestions for improvement are:

1. place the machines in an enclosed space to limit the number of people exposed to the noise, or use acoustic screens;
2. line the cabinets with sound absorbent material and place felt or other acoustic material under the machines;
3. add structural support to the cabinets to eliminate vibration or use a table with vibration absorbent spring construction;
4. replace flimsy drapery material with more absorbent fabric;
5. add acoustic tile to walls and ceiling;
6. remove shelving and other equipment which reflects noise and also may vibrate.

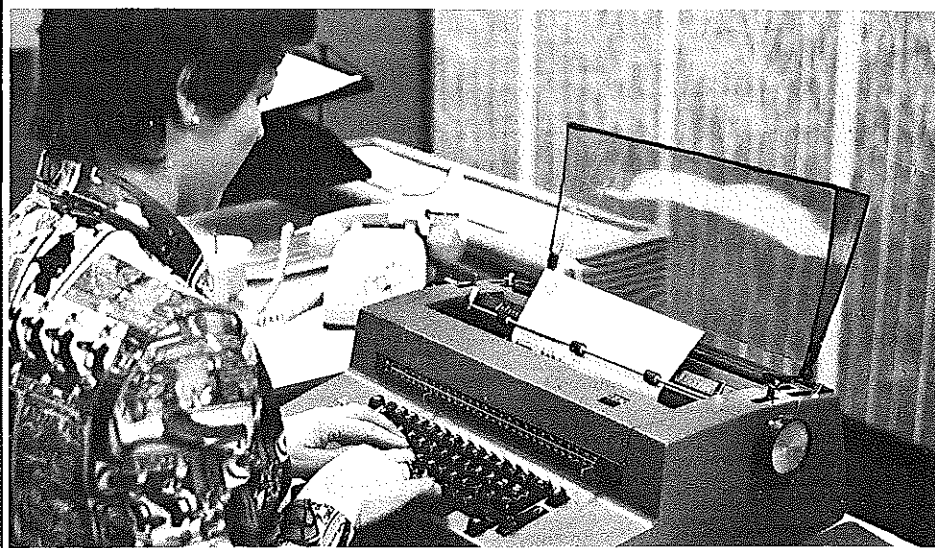
ol in the Office Environment

on the job. These include separating the noise source from the worker (walls or screens) and using sound absorbing materials (carpet). Mufflers and silencers, like typewriter covers, can also help a great deal. (The *Manual* is available at the WOHRC or from the UAW, 8000 East Jefferson Avenue, Detroit, MI 48214, for \$1.25.)



the Transmission Path

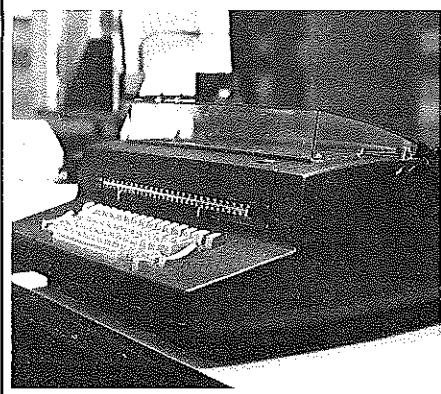
The Problem . . .



Typewriter noise is generally in the 63-69 dBA range, a level not usually associated with hearing loss. However, the annoyance and resultant stress can be a hazard in the workplace.

Typewriter noise levels can be significantly reduced by the use of the "sound reduction option" plastic cover shown here, and available from IBM for many of its Selectric typewriters. WOHRC measure-

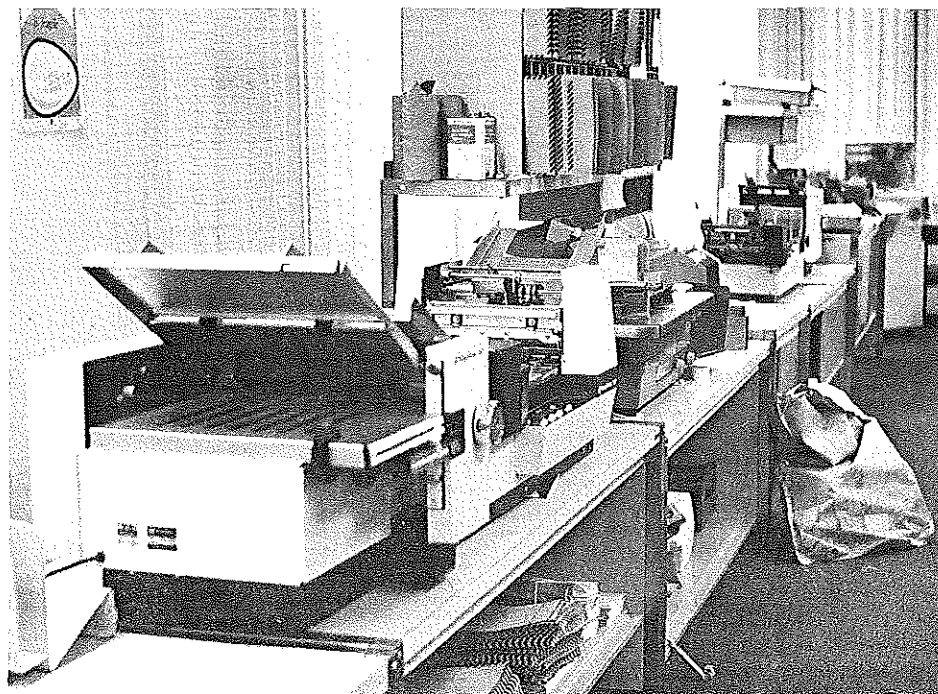
A Solution . . .



ments showed that noise levels at a typical bank of three typewriters could be cut by as much as 6dBA which most experts agree is a clearly noticeable difference.

Although IBM recommends the cover as "ideal for use in noise-sensitive areas such as hospitals, libraries and executive floors," this cheap addition (about \$25) should be a part of every typist's basic equipment, no matter where she works.

(One drawback is that the plastic tends to distort copy.)



Photos are courtesy of the British Columbia Government Employees Union (BCGEU).

Activities Round-Up

WLDF Urges Study of Clerical Workers' Health and Safety Hazards

The Women's Legal Defense Fund, a non-profit organization in Washington, D.C., which provides counseling and legal assistance to women in areas of sex-discrimination, has begun a letter-writing campaign to NIOSH urging it to undertake a comprehensive study of the health and safety hazards faced by the more than 14 million women currently employed as clerical workers. 35% of all employed women are clerical workers.

"Little attention has been paid to the work conditions of clerical workers," points out Judith Lichtman, Executive Director of the Women's Legal Defense Fund. Lighting and vision problems, exposure to chemicals, ventilation, seating, noise, equipment hazards, and psychological factors are potential problems.

The WLDF model letter requests that NIOSH publish not only technical studies of office workers' occupational health hazards but also practical studies which can be used directly in worker education.

For further information, contact: OSHA Committee, WLDF, 1010 Vermont Ave., N.W., Suite 210, Washington, D.C. 20006.

New Information on Asbestos

Useful to patients and physicians alike, *ASBESTOS* (National Cancer Institute) provides many materials at no cost. Call toll-free: (800) 638-6694.

The Western Institute for Occupational/Environmental Sciences has just released *Asbestos Disease—Are You Covered?* Single copies \$1, bulk rates possible; write: WIOES, 2001 Dwight Way, Berkeley, CA 94704.

An attractive, silk-screened poster on asbestos produced by the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers is a very informative artwork measuring 24" x 36". At \$16 from: OCAW, P.O. Box 2812, Denver, CO 80201.



AMERICAN HEALTH FOUNDATION
320 East 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10017
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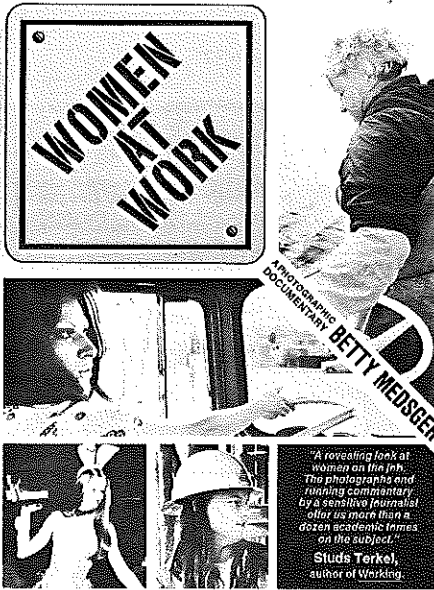
Please send me more information about the Women's Occupational Health Resource Center:

I would like to become a WOHRC subscriber. This includes 6 WOHRC Newsletters/year, Factsheets and announcements of other WOHRC publications as they appear during the year.

\$6 Student/others \$12 Professionals

Please send information on group/institutional rates.

Please make checks/money orders payable to: WOHRC, American Health Foundation. (Indicate any change of address.)



Women at Work: a photojournal by Betty Medsger, shows the multitude of "non-traditional" jobs women do. At \$7.95 (add 50¢ for handling) from WOHRC. On permanent loan to the WOHRC, Medsger's photo exhibit added greatly to the spirit of the Inaugural Forum.



Coalition

The Coalition for Reproductive Rights of Workers is forming. Any person or organization interested in more information about the Coalition and/or its Statement of Purpose may contact:

Anthony Mazzocchi
OCAW
P.O. Box 2812
Denver, CO 80201

Center Forum (cont'd)

hazards and not workers should be removed from the workplace in order to assure safe and healthy parenting for both men and women."

Labor Perspective

The Forum's labor representative, **Odessa Komer**, Vice President, United Auto Workers and member of WOHRC's Advisory Board, stated the commitment of her union to the right of the woman worker to work. Komer strongly asserted that work conditions should not impair health or reproductive abilities and called for an end to "paternalistic policies that consider females potentially pregnant at all times."

Legislative Initiatives

Congresswoman Elizabeth Holtzman, Forum co-sponsor, reiterated her commitment to legislation which will protect the occupational rights of women in remarks presented for her. Holtzman hopes to amend the Equal Pay Act to close the existing loopholes so that women may be able to achieve economic parity with men.

Holtzman accused the EEOC of failing to enforce the rights provided by Title VII and emphasized the need for EEOC to "promulgate regulations that spell out the guarantee of benefits and seniority for women and for men who take time off from employment to raise children."

Leon Warshaw, M.D., invited to present some perspectives on industry's view towards these issues, stressed the need for more precise scientific research on occupational health issues. Specifically, he pointed to the "appalling lack" of clear understanding of the male and female's respective contributions to the biological makeup of the fetus.

Dr. Jacqueline Messite, Regional Consultant, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, presented scientific perspectives, noted the importance of eliminating indirect causes of stress on working women, and called for increased child care services, varied work hours and more flexible work periods on the job. Both Drs. Messite and Warshaw are WOHRC Advisory Board members.

Copies of statements and a tape of the Forum are available from WOHRC.

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