



Finding the right hearing protection

Honeywell Safety Products

Whether upstream, midstream or downstream, the activities needed to bring us fuel can create a cacophony of both constant and intermittent noise as well as impact noise. Oil and gas worksites pose many hearing hazards — pumps, motors, generators, flaring, welding machines, catalysts and processing units, heavy earth moving equipment, tools and transportation noise. Worksites have lots of things going on simultaneously.

First, people and equipment are moving about making situational awareness critical for safety. Workers must guard against “over-protection” where the hearing protection is blocking not only hazardous noise but also critical sounds such as communication and warning signals. Another problem with over-protection actually leads to under-protection. When workers can hear their co-workers or the equipment they must monitor, they remove their hearing protection and increase the risks of noise-induced hearing loss. Earplug fit-testing can help workers select the right level of hearing protection for their environment.

The right hearing protection is the right way for workers to remain safe and sound.

Second, there are also multiple exposures that can harm hearing. Research has shown exposure to certain chemicals such as benzene, toluene and xylenes can cause damage to hearing. No matter the route of transmission, they damage the cells in the ear much like noise does. Combined exposures to both noise and “ototoxic” (ear poison) chemicals are synergistic — far worse than would be expected by noise alone or ototoxins alone.

When noise levels are extreme, the highest amount of protection can be achieved with a well-fit foam earplug, which comes in many shapes and sizes.

When noise levels are just loud enough to require raising your voice to talk over, or are intermittent, multiple-use earplugs are a good choice. They can be removed and re-inserted as hazardous levels of noise come and go.

If communication is vital, there are better options than removal of the hearing protector. The simplest solution is a “uniform attenuation” hearing protector. Attenuation refers to the amount of noise being blocked by the hearing protector. For most hearing protectors, high frequency sounds are more easily blocked than low frequency sounds. Uniform attenuation hearing protection has

either filters or electronics that allow some of the sound through to make speech understanding clearer. If communication errors could result in injuries or fatalities, a communication system that incorporates hearing protection, active noise reduction and amplification of the communication signal

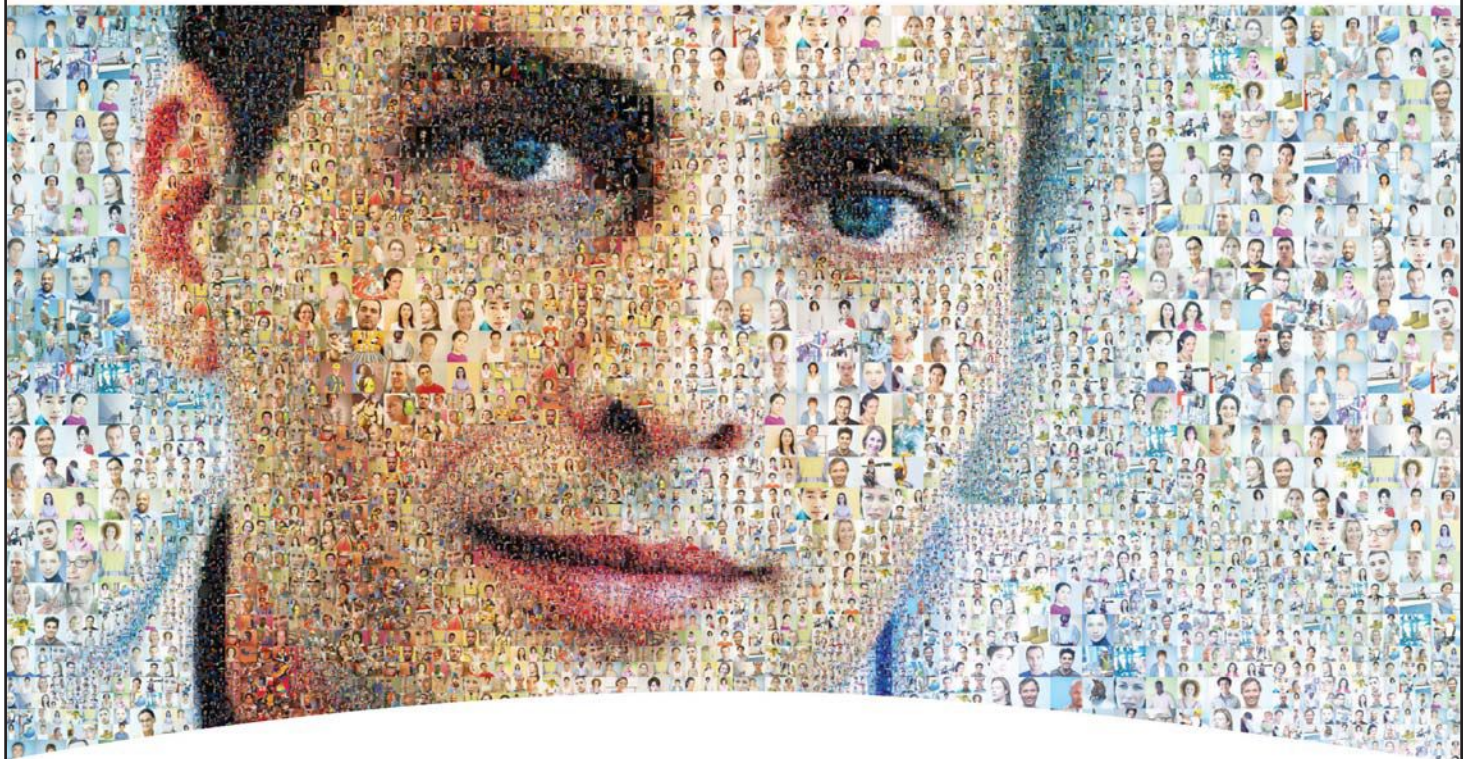
can help workers communicate in dangerous and changing environments.

Finding the right hearing protection for the varied needs in the oil and gas industry is not only required by regulation but it is the right way for workers to remain safe and sound.

Oil & Gas Business Development Manager Suzette Canady contributed to this article.

For instructions on obtaining a good fit, visit www.howardleight.com/#3, or for more information, visit www.honeywellsafety.com or call (800) 430-4110. ●

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