

DoD Hearing Conservation Working Group Update

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Objectives

Purpose: to provide information about the IOM Study and the GAO Report 11-114 as well as challenges in the way forward

1. Overview on 2006 IOM Study recommendations
2. Current GAO Report 11-114 recommendations
3. Challenges
4. Way Forward

IOM Recommendations

1. Work to achieve more extensive and consistent use of hearing protection by military personnel.
2. Include questions about the presence and severity of tinnitus in each ear on all audiometric records obtained from enlistment through the end of military service.
(In the remaining suggestions, audiograms and audiometric records are assumed to include responses to questions about the presence and severity of tinnitus.)

IOM Recommendations (cont'd)

3. Enforce requirements for audiograms prior to noise exposure for all new military Service Members (SMs) at *all basic training sites*.
4. Enforce, and establish where they do not presently exist, requirements for audiograms at the completion of military service to ensure that any hearing loss or tinnitus arising during military service is adequately documented. The Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs should explore whether resources are available within the VA system to aid the military services in conducting audiometric tests and tinnitus assessments for personnel completing their military service.

IOM Recommendations (cont'd)

5. Given the likely occurrence of maximum noise-induced hearing loss at 6000 Hz, include the measurement of hearing thresholds at 8000 Hz in all audiograms to allow for detection of the noise-notch pattern of hearing loss associated with noise exposure.
6. Enforce hearing conservation requirements for annual monitoring audiograms, as well as for follow-up audiograms if significant threshold shift is detected in annual monitoring audiograms.

IOM Recommendations (cont'd)

7. Continue to develop the Defense Occupational and Environmental Health Readiness System (DOEHRS) to improve its reporting capabilities to match and exceed those available with the services' previous systems. Further development of this system should include modification of the hearing conservation component (DOEHRS-HC) to track reports of tinnitus. It should also include implementation of the industrial hygiene component (DOEHRS-IH) to provide information on exposures to hazardous noise and other chemical, physical, biological, and ergonomic hazards.
8. Develop mechanisms to provide VA personnel access to records from DOEHRS-HC for review of disability claims for hearing loss or tinnitus that are not otherwise supported by audiometric records in the service medical record.

GAO Report

- BLUF...report states there is work to be done!
- What are we doing well?
 - Each Service has initiatives in place which hold promise for possible expansion across DoD
 - Audiovestibular Center for Excellence provides opportunities for collaboration across DoD and VA

GAO Recommendation #1

- DOD and the services improve upon the type, timing, and tracking of training and education provided to Service Members on hearing protection, by providing information that is more comprehensive and training that is more frequent and possibly earlier in Service Member's careers.

GAO Recommendation #2

- DOD work with the services to develop an appropriate set of performance indicators that assess how well services are reducing hearing loss among Service Members.

GAO Recommendation #3

- DOD and the services address limitations in the processes used to capture, track, and use performance data. This effort should address issues with data reliability, data entry, reporting capability, and integration across relevant databases.

GAO Recommendation #4

- DoD work with the services to examine the appropriateness and feasibility of expanding those service-level initiatives that hold promise of improving—on a DOD-wide basis—the military hearing conservation programs
- Particular attention should be focused on those efforts that already appear to have either increased compliance with program requirements or have demonstrated the potential to reduce hearing loss among Service Members, such as establishing hearing loss as a readiness issue, improving the comfort and design of hearing protection, and including noise experts more consistently in the procurement process

Challenges

- Strategic wheels turn slowly
- Historically hearing programs have lacked resourcing priority
- Continue to face cultural obstacles within the military

Way Forward

- DoD Hearing Conservation Working Group committed to moving forward to address IOM and GAO recommendations
- Address current 2011 NDAA requirements for aural screening
- Work in partnership with the VA and the Audiovestibular Center for Excellence