

# Ear plugs are not “one size fits all”

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Did you know you should “try on” your ear plugs like you would a pair of new shoes. When it comes to ear plug protection, one size doesn’t fit all. Employees at National Grid’s Dexter Street yard in Providence, RI recently found that out first hand.

During a presentation by the manufacturing company 3M, employees got to use a machine that allowed them to test different types of ear plugs and how effective they were for them personally. The right type of ear plug for one person may be entirely different for someone else.

During the test, employees put in ear plugs, while the testing machine emitted white noise at 105 decibels. The acceptable OSHA decibel level is 85. The machine detects how many decibels were blocked using that ear plug. What employees find is that in some cases they’ve put in the ear plug incorrectly, or that they’re using the wrong style altogether. Like anything else you wear, ear plugs need to be tried on and tested for the best protection.

“While choosing the right ear plug is very important, learning how to properly insert an ear plug is also a priority,” said Denise Griffing, Director of Health and Wellbeing. “An ear plug needs to be rolled between your fingers to compress it. Then, the outer ear has to be pulled with the other hand to straighten and open the ear canal. Once inserted, the plug should be held in place until it re-expands,” Denise added.

National Grid has ordered these hearing test machines for all of the jurisdictions, with plans to equip them in each medical office. The nurse practitioners will be administering the tests on a regular basis for those who receive annual hearing tests and based on employee interest for others.

“This is a really important initiative,” said Jeff O’Brien, Director of Gas Operations for Southern New England, who helped to plan the presentation at the Dexter Street yard. “Our goals are to work with employees to help them find the right ear plug and be sure they are using them properly. Employees may end up trying two or three different plugs before finding the best level of protection for them,” Jeff added.

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