

## Reverse signal alarms at construction jobsites

Construction jobsites are congested and noisy. Above the hammering, sawing, and other sounds, you frequently hear numerous reverse signal alarms. In fact, this is one of the specific challenges of the new construction hearing conservation program rule in the works. The problem is:

- Construction workers need hearing protection.
- Construction workers need to hear the sounds at the jobsite.
- So many sounds can sometimes blend together, causing workers to ignore them, and that creates a hazard.

While OSHA and industry gurus work on the problem, let's review the current requirements. OSHA recently used the following question from a manufacturer to reiterate the requirements for reverse signal alarms at construction jobsites.

Question: Does a back-up alarm that uses "white noise" instead of a single tone meet the requirements of 29 CFR 1926.601(b)(4)(i) and 1926.602(a)(9)(ii)?

Answer: OSHA is generally precluded from approving or endorsing specific products. The variable working conditions at job sites and possible alteration or misapplication of an otherwise safe piece of equipment could easily create a hazardous condition beyond the control of the equipment manufacturer. However, where appropriate, we try to give some guidance to help employers assess whether products are appropriate to use in light of OSHA requirements. Title 29 CFR 1926.601(b)(4) states: No employer shall use any motor vehicle equipment having an obstructed view to the rear unless:

- The vehicle has a reverse signal alarm audible above the surrounding noise level, or
- The vehicle is backed up only when an observer signals that it is safe to do so.

Section 1926.602(a)(9)(ii) states: No employer shall permit earthmoving or compacting equipment which has an obstructed view to the rear to be used in reverse gear unless the equipment has in operation a reverse signal alarm distinguishable from the surrounding noise level or an employee signals that it is safe to do so.

These provisions, by their terms, do not specify that a reverse signal alarm be of the single-tone type. However, we have neither the data nor the resources to evaluate whether this particular device would be "audible above the surrounding noise level" as required by the standard. If it does meet this test—that is, provides adequate warning to workers in the path of the vehicle, and to workers walking towards the path of the vehicle in time to avoid contact—it would comply with the requirements of §1926.601(b)(4).

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