



# WisCon Words of Wisdom

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## March Awareness Topics

March 8-14: [National Patient Safety Awareness](#)

March 15-21: [National Poison Prevention](#)

March 22-28: [National Cleaning Week](#)

All Month Long:

[Brain Injury Awareness Month](#)

[National Nutrition Month](#)

[Workplace Eye Wellness Month](#)

[National Ladder Safety Awareness](#)

## Safety Champions

Safety Champions is OSHA's newest Co-operative Program aimed at employers to better their safety and health program using much of the same elements as the Safety and Health Assessment Worksheet (Form 33) that Consultation Programs use when performing consultation visits.

This program has 3 Steps that facilities can work through at their own pace. Participants can also request a review of their program by a Special Government Employee to identify room for improvement. Find out more about the Safety Champions Program on OSHA's [website](#).

### We want to hear from you!

What content would you like to see in an upcoming newsletter?

Let us know [here](#).

## March Is Ladder Safety Month

Falls from ladders remain one of the leading causes of workplace fatalities, making ladder safety a critical priority for employers and workers alike. In recognition of this risk, March is observed as **National Ladder Safety Month**, an initiative led by the American Ladder Institute (ALI) to promote safe ladder practices at work and at home.

Falls continue to rank among the most common causes of workplace deaths. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), falls, slips, and trips accounted for 885 fatal work injuries in 2023 across all industries. In construction alone, these incidents were responsible for 39.2 percent of all industry fatalities. Portable ladders and stairs were the primary source of 109 fatal work injuries in 2023, and ladder-related violations consistently rank among the top citations issued by OSHA.

Preventing ladder-related accidents starts with selecting the right ladder for the job. Workers should choose the proper type, such as a stepladder or extension ladder, based on height and task requirements. The ladder's duty rating must support the combined weight of the user, tools, and materials, and the material should match the environment, with fiberglass preferred for electrical work due to its non-conductive properties.

Inspection is equally critical. OSHA standards require that ladders be inspected before each use and during each shift (General Industry) and periodically by a competent person (Construction). Workers should check for damaged or missing rungs, loose side rails, worn safety feet, cracked components, and defective ropes or hardware. Damaged ladders should be removed from service immediately and tagged "Dangerous: Do Not Use" until repaired or replaced.

Proper setup significantly reduces risk. Ladders should be placed on stable, level surfaces and secured to prevent movement. Extension ladders should follow the 4-to-1 rule and extend at least three feet above a landing surface. Safe climbing practices include maintaining three points of contact, facing the ladder, and avoiding over-reaching. Workers should never stand on the top step of a stepladder, exceed weight limits, or move a ladder while it is in use.

Finally, comprehensive training and active supervision ensure that safety procedures are understood and consistently followed. While ladder safety is vital, employers must also address other fall hazards, including scaffolding, roofs, platforms, and walking surfaces. Good housekeeping, proper fall protection, and ongoing training remain the foundation of a strong fall prevention program.

By committing to safe ladder practices, especially during National Ladder Safety Month, organizations can significantly reduce injuries and save lives. Ladder safety should also be practiced at home.

## Noise Reduction Rating (NRR) and Earbuds

Hearing protection is rated by its ability to reduce the amount of sound entering your ears. This reduction is referred to as attenuation. The Noise Reduction Rating (NRR) represents the amount of attenuation provided by a hearing protection device.

The NRR is a laboratory derived number estimating the attenuation achieved by the hearing protection device being tested. The NRR is established through the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) testing protocols. ([eCFR :: 40 CFR Part 211 -- Product Noise Labeling](#)). The NRR is no longer supported by the EPA ([EPA History: Noise and the Noise Control Act | US EPA](#)), but is still applicable to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's Hearing Conservation Standard ([29 CFR 1910.95](#)).

In acknowledgment of actual use being different from a laboratory testing environment, OSHA requires that 7 decibels (db) be subtracted from the device's NRR number when considering exposure to the hearing conservation level of 85 dbA (decibels A-weighted scale). When considering the engineering level of 90 dbA, an additional 50% safety factor is applied to the NRR adjustment calculation. ([OSHA Technical Manual \(OTM\) - Section III: Chapter 5 | Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#), Appendix F-Noise Reduction Rating)

When evaluating a product as a hearing protection device for workplace noise exposures, the product must have an NRR. If no NRR is provided by the manufacturer, then the product cannot be used for workplace hearing protection.

When reviewing a product's NRR information, it is essential that you read the instructions and footnotes. Earbud instructions and

footnote information may contain statements such as:

- Do not use earbuds in situations that require special attention or awareness of your surroundings,
- The earbuds have to be free from damage, clean and properly inserted,
- Certain features must be enabled for noise canceling properties,
- Noise cancellation is frequency dependent and may not be as effective for higher frequencies,
- Exposure limits apply over a 7-day period,
- The NRR may not be accurate for protection against impulse or impact noise

Another factor to consider is that at minimum, OSHA requires that 7 dB be subtracted from the NRR, such that an NRR of 10 is really an NRR of 3. When all of these factors are taken into consideration, the advertised NRR for the earbuds may not be as high as needed to reduce the noise to an acceptable level. Additionally, OSHA does not approve or certify products.

Several of the items noted above can also apply to traditional ear plugs, so it is just as important that you understand their proper use, care and limitations no matter the style that you are wearing. Noise induced hearing loss is preventable and is not just limited to workplace exposures. Protect your hearing regardless of the location.

## Disposing of Solvent-Soaked Rags

Rags that are contaminated with flammable liquids like gasoline, acetone, or paint thinners can present significant fire hazards. These liquids evaporate quickly, releasing **flammable vapors** that can ignite from the smallest spark, including static discharge or hot work. Improper disposal can lead to catastrophic fires.

**When disposing of these rags, keep the following in mind:**

- **Use Approved Containers:** Always dispose of solvent-soaked rags in metal, self-closing containers certified by nationally recognized testing laboratories (NRTLs) like UL or FM. These containers seal tightly and trap harmful vapors inside, preventing oxygen from fueling a potential fire.
- **Avoid Overfilling:** Never overfill the container. Doing so can

create friction and trap heat, increasing the risk of a fire.

- **Daily Removal:** Never leave contaminated rags overnight. Dispose of them daily in a designated outdoor hazardous waste drum to avoid accumulation of vapors in confined spaces.
- **Never Pour Flammable Liquids Down the Drain:** Never dispose of flammable liquids or contaminated rags in municipal trash or drains. Use proper hazardous waste disposal programs, in accordance with local regulations.

By following these safety measures, you reduce the risk of fire and ensure the safety of your workspace and employees. Always refer to OSHA and NFPA guidelines for compliance.

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