2016

Can Noisy Gardeners turn over a New Leaf? Evaluation of Landscapers and Gardeners on a University Campus

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Publication Details  
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Abstract
Abstract presented at AIOH 2016, 3-7 December 2016, Gold Coast, Australia.

Keywords
noisy, can, campus, landscapers, university, evaluation, leaf?, over, turn, gardeners

Disciplines
Education | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details

This conference paper is available at Research Online: http://ro.uow.edu.au/sspapers/2763
Can Noisy Gardeners turn over a New Leaf? Evaluation of Landscapers and Gardeners on a University Campus

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Although over 22,000 Australian workers are employed as landscapers and gardeners and perform tasks that use a variety of tools increasing their risk of noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL), studies on their noise exposure are limited. This study characterised the noise exposure of landscapers employed on an 82 hectare University campus. A combination of full shift personal dosimetry and task based monitoring was utilised (in accordance with AS/NZS 1269.1:2005) to evaluate and characterise their exposure. Participants also filled out an activity card to document their tasks, tools used, location and noise perception. Sound pressure levels produced by various pieces of equipment and tools were measured at under various conditions using a sound level meter. These measurements were used to assess worker noise exposure profiles, particularly the contributing source of noise and inform recommendations for control. Hand-held power tools, mulchers and ride-on equipment contributed significantly to worker noise exposure. This study demonstrates that landscapers and gardeners may be routinely exposed to noise levels above the guidelines set out in Safe Work Australia “Model Codes of Practice - Managing Noise and Preventing Hearing Loss at Work” and state regulations; and that the implementation of effective hearing conservation programs is necessary to reduce their risk to NIHL.