

Hearing protection



Tips from the Posse  
By Mark Rackay

Anyone, regardless of age, should consider wearing some hearing protection when outdoors and sound levels come into play. Take a moment to consider just how many activities you take part in that can harm your hearing. Everything from running a chainsaw, mowing the lawn, running a compressor in the garage, to firearms, can permanently damage your hearing. About one in 10 Americans have a hearing loss that affects their ability to understand normal speech. Far and away the biggest cause of hearing loss is excessive noise exposure. I am one of those Americans who suffer this loss. Mine came from years of shooting as a kid without using hearing protection. I thought it was for sissies. Another one of those life lessons I learned the hard way. Sound levels are measured in decibels (dB), with the increase in sound intensity being expressed in a logarithmic scale. The faintest sound heard by the human ear is represented as 0 dB, while a sound ten times more powerful is 10 dB. A sound 100 times more powerful would measure 20 dB. What this scale teaches us is that a reduction of sound from 140 dB to 115 dB would be a much more significant reduction in intensity, than say one from 50 dB to 25 dB. Two people talking outside would register at around 50 to 60 dB, whereas mowing the



Hearing protection comes in many sizes and shapes but is not expensive compared to permanent hearing loss. (Special to the Montrose Daily press/ Mark Rackay)

lawn or running a compressor is around 90 dB. Riding a snowmobile or running a chainsaw scores around 100 dB. A car horn is around 115 dB and discharge of a firearm runs at 140 dB. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) says that habitual exposure to noise above 85 dB will cause gradual hearing loss. For unprotected ears, the allowed exposure time decreases as the sound intensity increases. Exposure is limited to eight hours at 90dB, four hours at 95dB and two hours at 100dB. The highest permissible exposure for an unprotected ear is 115dB for 15 minutes a day. Any noise above

140dB is not permitted at all. People all have a different sensitivity to how much noise they can stand. Generally speaking, a noise can damage your hearing if you have to shout to make yourself heard. If the noise hurts your ears, makes your ears ring, or if you have difficulty hearing for several hours after the exposure to the noise, the intensity is too great for an unprotected ear. The problem is not just the hearing loss that can be a problem. Noise can cause a condition called tinnitus, which is a ringing in the ear, and in some cases, it becomes permanent. Loud noise can also cause people to react with high anxiety, increased

pulse rate and blood pressure, or an increase in stomach acid. The length of time that you hear the noise can be equally damaging to your ears. Long exposure to noise, such as riding a snowmobile, can cause damage. Consider this when you wear those headphones with your music while at the gym. Hearing protectors come in two styles, earmuffs and earplugs. Earplugs fit into the ear canal and must be kept clean in order to keep a good seal. I carry a set of these in a small container that will easily fit in your pocket. If you use earplugs on a regular basis, it is not overly expensive to get a pair custom made for your ears. There are

do-it-yourself kits available for making your own set. Earmuffs fit over the entire ear and form a seal so that the entire ear canal is blocked. They also serve to protect the sensitive small bones in the ear canal. There are electronic earmuffs that allow normal conversation to be heard, but have an automatic shutdown for sounds that reach a dangerous level. These are especially useful for shooters that want to converse with others at the range. Earmuffs or earplugs generally reduce dB levels from 15 to 30 dB depending on the style and quality. Obviously, you should seek the highest level of protection. For the highest levels of exposure, anything over 110dB, consider wearing earplugs and earmuffs together. Combined, they usually add 10 to 15dB more protection than either one used alone. If you have hearing loss, see your doctor. He can set you up with a specialist to help manage the loss you have. It is never too late to use hearing protection to save what hearing you have left. I find myself more conscious about protection these days and trying to keep what little I have left. Foam earplugs cost as little as a quarter a set and it is money well spent. Make the effort to protect your hearing whatever your outdoor activity may be. Better safe to wear the protection than sorry later. The only good side to hearing loss is I can't hear my wife call for me to do some chore. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

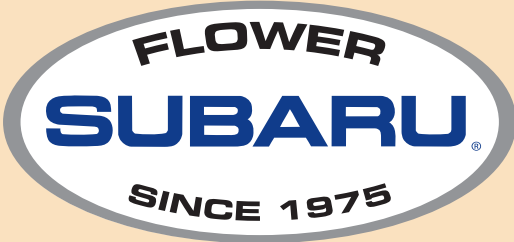
Mark Rackay is a columnist who writes for the Montrose Daily Press and an avid hunter that travels across North America and serves as a director and public information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse, call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org)



The Great Outdoors Expo is a two-day celebration that includes exciting exhibits and fun activities for outdoor enthusiasts of all ages. The expo exhibitors will feature hunting and fishing gear, wildlife art, gifts, bikes, golf equipment, books, outdoor apparel, camping equipment, Kayaks, boats, recreational vehicles, game calls and more. This event is being heavily marketed to outdoor enthusiasts locally and throughout the Four Corners. Be sure to register early!

FRIDAY, APRIL 27<sup>TH</sup>  
SATURDAY, APRIL 28<sup>TH</sup>  
FRIENDSHIP HALL

PRESENTED BY



WWW.FLOWERMOTORSUBARU.COM

FOR MORE INFO

3684 NORTH TOWNSEND AVE. MONTROSE, CO  
970-249-3444 | [WWW.MONTROSEPRESS.COM](http://WWW.MONTROSEPRESS.COM)

MONTROSE DAILY PRESS