

DESCRIBE THE RESULTS AND OUTCOMES OF THE INITIATIVE

By bringing both programs in-house, the District has saved ratepayers at least \$16,000 to date while significantly reducing risk, improving employee safety, and increasing operational flexibility. A key component has been establishing baseline hearing tests at hire and conducting exit testing at separation, ensuring consistent documentation and early detection of any changes. Given that workers' compensation claims for noise-induced hearing loss can range from \$5,000 to \$150,000 depending on severity, this proactive approach plays a critical role in mitigating potential claims and demonstrating a strong commitment to employee protection.

Routine testing throughout employment, paired with onboarding and offboarding assessments, strengthens the District's ability to track and manage risk while reinforcing best practices. Staff and management alike have benefited from the flexibility of on-site testing, which eliminates the scheduling constraints and operational disruptions often associated with third-party vendors. Overall, these efforts have enhanced efficiency, reduced costs, and created a safer, more effective work environment.

DESCRIBE THE RISK OR CONCERN

Failing to implement a hearing conservation program in high-noise environments (85 dBA over 8 hours) puts employees at risk of permanent hearing loss and increases accident potential due to missed warnings, while also leading to fines, claims, and legal exposure. Coordinating required testing has traditionally been costly and difficult, with scheduling conflicts, emergencies, and the need for baseline or exit tests often forcing off-site, one-off appointments.

Similarly, without a comprehensive respiratory protection program, improper respirator fit can expose employees to harmful dust, fumes, and biological agents, creating serious health risks and a false sense of safety. Like hearing tests, fit testing through third parties is often disrupted by operational demands, requiring rescheduling or external testing—ultimately making the human and financial costs far greater than investing in proper, consistent safety programs.

DESCRIBE DETAILS OF THE PROCESS AND SOLUTIONS IMPLEMENTED:

To improve flexibility and reduce costs, the District brought hearing and respiratory testing in-house. The Risk and Safety Manager became a Certified Occupational Hearing Conservationist through the University of Alabama at Birmingham, allowing internal hearing testing using SHOEBOX's software-based audiometry platform, which also enables remote review by an audiologist.

For respiratory testing, the District implemented OHD's QuantiFit2, a portable system using Controlled Negative Pressure technology to deliver fast, accurate fit tests in under two minutes. Its portability allows testing to be conducted on-site or in the field, improving efficiency and eliminating reliance on third-party scheduling.

