

Media Release

Hearing Week (26th April – 2nd May 2010)

DEAFENING DECIBELS DAMAGING DIYers

Every weekend thousands of kiwis are putting their hearing in jeopardy by undertaking seemingly innocuous home and garden *Do it Yourself* projects.

One in three DIYers potentially damage their hearing through weekend home improvement pursuits and with just over half the country regularly involved with DIY, some 700,000 kiwis are seriously at risk of damaging their hearing.

The National Foundation for the Deaf (NFD) has revealed these facts after the results of their latest survey, commissioned in the lead-up to the Hearing Week 2010 and are delivering a clear message for people who engage in home improvement activities – always wear hearing protection.

The Market Knowledge survey conducted nationwide showed the kiwi culture of DIY is well and truly alive with 75 per cent of home owners reporting to be regular DIYers with the most common activities being lawn mowing, using a weed-eater, electric drill or hammer.

Louise Carroll, General Manager of the NFD says that being a nation that loves to mow lawns, fire up the leaf blower or undertake home renovations, it is crucial to educate people on the damage these activities can potentially have on our hearing.

“Prolonged exposure to excessive noise can lead to hearing damage or even permanent hearing loss. While this may not threaten lives, it has a major impact on a person’s quality of life. It is so easy to avoid any damage by simply wearing earmuffs or earplugs,” says Ms Carroll.

“DIY is part of our culture and should be embraced,” she says, “but people need to realise hearing loss through over-exposure to noise develops so slowly and insidiously that we often don’t know it has happened until it’s too late. The most frustrating thing for us is that it is preventable, and the precautions people can take are simple and easy to adopt.”

Alarmingly, many DIYers believe they are not in danger of damaging their hearing because they're either not doing the activities for a prolonged duration, not using really loud tools or just cannot be bothered to wear hearing protection, all of which Stephanie Mears, Senior Audiologist from Bay Audiology dismisses.

"You do not need to be exposed to DIY tools for long periods to cause hearing damage. A series of sudden loud sounds from a nail gun could potentially cause as much damage as spending the weekend cutting up firewood with a chainsaw.

"Don't forget those around you are also at risk from DIY noise. If children or family members are nearby while you're carrying out DIY activities, their hearing could be damaged and they should either be at a safe distance or wearing some sort of protection," says Ms Mears.

"If you ever experience tinnitus – a ringing, buzzing or humming in the ears - following DIY activities, then you may have already damaged your hearing. Even if you are fortunate enough for the tinnitus to dissipate over time, the delicate hair cells of the inner ear have been irreparably injured."

Nearly half of those surveyed do not wear hearing protection when carrying out the most common of all DIY tasks - lawn mowing. The decibel level of a lawn mower can exceed 95 decibels (dB) and hearing damage begins with noise above 85dB.

However it is not only heavy-duty power tools causing damage. A staggering 73 per cent of respondents acknowledged they do not use hearing protection when hammering. The short, sharp sound of banging a few nails into wood can reach 127dB which can be compared to the noise generated from a gun shot and could cause damage or even deafness.

Further survey results showed that nearly half the number of respondents do not wear hearing protection when using the weed-eater, a piece of machinery capable of producing 105dB, nor do 58 per cent when using the electric drill which generates around 80dB, normally in very close proximity to the ears.

Even though responsible DIYers are taking precautions to protect their own hearing, a disturbing 38 per cent allow their children to be exposed to dangerous levels of noise.

The survey also revealed DIYers are not just "home handyman" with 53 per cent of respondents being female. Statistically females show a disregard for hearing safety more than men when it comes to wearing hearing protection.

Hearing protection such as earmuffs are readily available from hardware stores and power tool suppliers, earplugs can be purchased from chemists or through the Hearing Association website www.hearwell.co.nz

ENDS

**The research was conducted by Market Knowledge for the NFD in February 2010. It involved an online interview of 500 New Zealand Home Owners over 18 years of age who undertake DIY activities. The interview was for an average of 10 minutes and the sample was nationally representative.*

Released on behalf of the National Foundation for the Deaf by DonovanBoyd PR

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