The Correctional Hearing Conservation Handbook

Occupational audiometry, OSHA compliance, and on-site hearing screening for correctional staff

Mobile Audiology for California Corrections — First Edition — July 2026

This e-book is editorial and educational commentary published by Mobile Audiology for California Corrections in July 2026. It summarizes publicly reported occupational-health standards and hearing-conservation practices as an aid to safety, health, and facility professionals; it is not legal, medical, or compliance advice, and it does not replace the current text of OSHA regulations, applicable standards, or the judgment of a qualified audiologist or occupational-health professional. Regulations and standards change — always verify against the current OSHA text and applicable requirements. No statement here guarantees any compliance, audit, or health outcome.

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Foreword

Hearing loss caused by workplace noise is permanent, and it is preventable. That single fact is the entire reason occupational hearing conservation exists. For employees who work in noisy environments, the difference between keeping their hearing and losing it often comes down to whether their employer runs a real, consistent hearing conservation program — one that monitors exposure, provides protection, and tests hearing on schedule.

Mobile Audiology for California Corrections provides occupational audiometric testing and hearing conservation support for staff at California's correctional institutions. Our focus is employee health: baseline and periodic audiometry for noise-exposed personnel, defensible test conditions, and the documentation a hearing conservation program requires. We bring the testing to the facility, delivered by our own licensed audiologists.

This handbook is written for the safety officers, occupational-health staff, and administrators responsible for protecting employees' hearing. It treats hearing conservation strictly as the occupational-health discipline it is. Read it once, then keep it with your program documentation. The checklists at the end of each chapter are meant to be adapted to your own facility and workforce.

Chapter 1 — Hearing Conservation Is Occupational Health

The first thing to understand about hearing conservation is that it belongs squarely to occupational health and safety. It is about protecting employees from a permanent, work-related injury — noise-induced hearing loss — through a structured program of monitoring, protection, and audiometric surveillance. Framed correctly, it is workplace injury prevention, no different in principle from any other program that keeps workers safe.

What makes noise-induced hearing loss distinctive is that it is both permanent and preventable. Once hearing is lost to noise, it does not come back — there is no repair, no recovery, only management of the deficit. But the loss is entirely preventable through the well-understood tools of noise monitoring, hearing protection, and regular audiometric testing. This combination — irreversible if it happens, avoidable if you act — is exactly what makes a consistent program so valuable. Every case prevented is a permanent injury that never occurs.

The scale of the exposure is significant. Roughly 22 million U.S. workers face hazardous workplace noise each year, and any workplace with elevated noise levels puts its employees at risk. A hearing conservation program is the structured response to that risk, and its purpose is straightforward: keep employees' hearing intact over the length of their careers.

For a facility, running such a program is both an obligation to employees and a matter of compliance. Employees deserve protection from a preventable injury, and employers are required to provide it

where noise exposures reach defined levels. Mobile Audiology for California Corrections supports that obligation with the audiometric-testing component of the program — the surveillance that detects hearing changes early, while there is still time to act. Everything in this book treats hearing conservation as what it is: occupational health for the people who work in these facilities.

Field Checklist

- Treat hearing conservation as workplace injury prevention
- Recognize noise-induced loss as permanent but preventable
- Center the program on protecting employees' hearing

Chapter 2 — The OSHA Standard for Noise-Exposed Staff

The framework for occupational hearing conservation in the United States is OSHA's occupational noise exposure standard, 29 CFR 1910.95. Understanding what it requires is the foundation of any compliant program, and it defines the obligations a facility takes on when its employees are exposed to hazardous noise.

The standard's trigger is a specific exposure level: a hearing conservation program is required for workers exposed at or above 85 dBA averaged over an 8-hour workday. This is the action level that moves hearing conservation from optional good practice to a defined obligation. Determining which employees meet or exceed it — through noise monitoring — is the first step, because the monitoring identifies exactly who the program must cover.

Once triggered, the standard requires a set of connected components: noise monitoring to characterize exposure, audiometric testing to track employees' hearing over time, hearing protection to reduce exposure, training so employees understand the risk and their protection, and recordkeeping to document the whole program. These are not independent tasks; they form a system in which each part supports the others. Monitoring identifies who needs protection; testing confirms the protection is working; training makes it effective; recordkeeping proves it happened.

Audiometric testing is the component Mobile Audiology for California Corrections provides, and it is the program's early-warning system. Testing is how a facility detects a change in an employee's hearing while there is still time to intervene — with better protection, retraining, or follow-up — before a temporary shift becomes a permanent loss. A program without consistent audiometry is flying blind on the one thing that matters most: whether employees' hearing is actually holding. Always verify the current text of 29 CFR 1910.95, as regulatory details can change.

Field Checklist

- Identify employees exposed at or above 85 dBA over 8 hours
- Implement all connected components of the standard
- Use audiometric testing as the program's early-warning system

Chapter 3 — The Baseline and the Annual Audiogram

Audiometric surveillance rests on two kinds of test: the baseline audiogram and the annual audiogram. The relationship between them is the heart of the program, because hearing conservation

works by comparison — detecting change against a known starting point.

The baseline audiogram establishes a reference. It captures an employee's hearing near the start of their exposure, before workplace noise has had a chance to cause damage, and every future test is compared against it. A baseline done properly — under quiet conditions, following the appropriate quiet period from workplace noise — is the anchor for everything that follows. A baseline done poorly compromises every comparison built on it, which is why getting the baseline right matters so much.

Annual audiograms then track change over time. Each year, an employee's hearing is measured and compared against the baseline to detect a standard threshold shift — a defined worsening in hearing that signals the program needs to respond. Catching that shift early is the entire point: it is the moment when intervention can still prevent further loss. An annual test that reveals a shift is not a failure of the program; it is the program working exactly as designed, flagging a problem while there is still time to act.

Consistency is what makes the comparison meaningful. Tests must be conducted under controlled, comparable conditions from year to year, because a difference in test conditions can masquerade as a change in hearing — or hide a real one. Mobile Audiology for California Corrections delivers baseline and periodic audiometry under consistent, controlled conditions, so year-over-year comparisons reflect employees' actual hearing rather than testing variation. The value of surveillance lies entirely in the reliability of the comparison.

Field Checklist

- Establish a proper baseline before exposure causes change
- Compare annual audiograms against the baseline for shifts
- Keep test conditions consistent year over year

Chapter 4 — Testing Where the Staff Work

A recurring obstacle to hearing conservation is simple logistics: getting employees to a testing facility. Mobile, on-site audiometry solves that problem by bringing the testing to the workplace, and for a facility with staff who cannot easily leave their posts, this is a major practical advantage.

The problem with off-site testing is that it competes with the workday. Sending employees to an external clinic means travel time, scheduling friction, and lost coverage, and in practice this is where hearing conservation programs lose compliance — tests get postponed, missed, or skipped because the logistics are too disruptive. A program that is required annually only works if the testing actually happens every year, on schedule, for everyone who needs it. Anything that makes testing harder makes the program weaker.

On-site testing removes that friction. When the audiometry comes to the facility, employees are tested efficiently, without the overhead of transporting them elsewhere, and compliance rises because the barrier to getting tested falls. Mobile Audiology for California Corrections brings the equipment, the licensed audiologists, and the compliant recordkeeping to the facility on a coordinated schedule, so a facility coordinates access and little else. The testing fits the workday instead of fighting it.

For correctional facilities specifically, on-site testing carries an added operational benefit: it minimizes the movement and coverage disruptions that transporting staff off-site would create. Bringing the

service to the institution keeps employees close to their responsibilities while still completing their required testing. The result is a program that is easier to sustain — and a sustainable program is the only kind that actually protects hearing over the long run.

Field Checklist

- Bring testing on-site to remove logistical barriers
- Schedule testing to fit the workday, not disrupt it
- Minimize staff movement and coverage impact

Chapter 5 — ANSI S3.6 and Defensible Test Conditions

An audiogram is only as trustworthy as the conditions under which it was produced. This is where technical standards matter, because a hearing test conducted in inadequate conditions can produce results that are simply wrong — and wrong results undermine the whole purpose of surveillance.

The relevant standard for audiometers is ANSI S3.6, the specification for audiometers, which defines the requirements the testing equipment must meet. Testing on equipment that conforms to this standard is what makes an audiogram technically valid. Equipment that does not meet the standard, or that is not properly calibrated to it, cannot be trusted to produce accurate results — and an inaccurate audiogram is worse than none, because it creates false confidence in a number that is not real.

Ambient noise during testing is the other critical factor. A hearing test must be conducted in a sufficiently quiet environment, because background noise can mask an employee's true hearing thresholds and distort the result. This is the technical challenge of on-site testing: the workplace is not naturally quiet. It is solved with soundproof testing booths certified to ANSI standards, and with portable diagnostic audiometers designed for field use that monitor and document ambient conditions during each test. Integrated noise monitoring means every audiogram carries a record of the conditions under which it was produced.

The purpose of all this rigor is defensibility. A hearing conservation program's audiometric records may need to withstand scrutiny — in an audit, a compliance review, or a workers' compensation matter — and records are only defensible if the test conditions were controlled and documented. Mobile Audiology for California Corrections tests with ANSI S3.6-compliant equipment and documents ambient conditions for every test, so the resulting audiograms are technically sound and defensible. Getting the conditions right is what makes the data mean something.

Field Checklist

- Test on ANSI S3.6-compliant, calibrated audiometers
- Control and document ambient noise during every test
- Keep records defensible for audit and review

Chapter 6 — Documentation and Program Continuity

A hearing conservation program is, in large part, its documentation. The testing protects employees; the records prove the protection happened and provide the history that makes surveillance

meaningful over a career. Both are essential, and the documentation is where many programs quietly fall short.

OSHA's standard requires recordkeeping for a reason: without records, a program cannot demonstrate that it did what it was required to do. Every audiogram, every comparison, every follow-up action needs to be documented and retained, because the record is the evidence. A test that was performed but not properly recorded is, for compliance and continuity purposes, a test that leaves a gap — and gaps in a longitudinal record undermine the comparisons the whole program depends on.

Continuity over time is what makes audiometric records genuinely valuable. Hearing changes slowly, and the pattern across years of testing tells the real story of an employee's hearing health. A well-maintained record allows each year's test to be compared against a consistent history, so a gradual shift is detected as a trend rather than missed as noise. Fragmented or inconsistent records break that continuity and blind the program to exactly the slow changes it exists to catch.

For a facility, reliable documentation is both a compliance asset and a practical one. It supports audits, informs follow-up, and provides the defensible history a program may need if an employee's hearing loss is ever questioned. Mobile Audiology for California Corrections aligns its testing reports, archival, and compliance tracking with proper recordkeeping standards, so a facility's hearing conservation record is complete and continuous. The testing is the visible service; the disciplined documentation is what makes it hold up over years.

Field Checklist

- Document and retain every audiogram and follow-up
- Maintain continuous records for year-over-year comparison
- Keep documentation audit-ready and defensible

Chapter 7 — Coordination in a Secure Environment

Delivering audiometric testing inside a correctional facility adds a coordination dimension that ordinary occupational-health settings do not have. A secure environment has legitimate operational and security requirements, and a mobile testing program has to work within them smoothly and professionally.

The central requirement is coordination with the facility's operations. Bringing equipment, staff, and a testing setup into a secure environment means working with the institution's security and health operations to arrange access, scheduling, and logistics in a way that respects the facility's constraints. A provider that understands this coordinates cleanly and unobtrusively; one that does not creates friction. The professional standard is to fit the facility's procedures, not to expect the facility to accommodate the provider.

Scheduling has to respect operational realities. Testing employees means fitting the service around staffing, coverage, and the facility's daily rhythm, so that hearing conservation is accomplished without disrupting operations. A coordinated schedule — worked out in advance with the facility — is what makes on-site testing practical in this setting rather than an operational burden. The goal is a program the facility barely has to think about once access is arranged.

Professionalism and discretion define good service in a secure environment. The work is occupational health for the facility's staff, delivered by licensed audiologists who conduct themselves appropriately in the setting. Mobile Audiology for California Corrections coordinates with each facility's security and health operations to deliver staff hearing screening with minimal operational impact. Handled well, the program becomes a routine, reliable part of the facility's occupational-health effort — present when needed, unobtrusive throughout, and consistent year after year.

Field Checklist

- Coordinate access with security and health operations
- Schedule around staffing and operational realities
- Deliver testing professionally and unobtrusively

Conclusion: Prevention You Can Prove

Occupational hearing conservation comes down to a simple, serious purpose: protecting employees from a permanent, preventable injury, and proving that the protection was delivered. Everything in this book serves that purpose — the OSHA framework that defines the obligation, the baseline and annual audiograms that detect hearing change early, the on-site delivery that keeps testing from being skipped, the ANSI S3.6 conditions that make the results trustworthy, the documentation that provides continuity and defensibility, and the coordination that makes it all work inside a secure facility.

The standards driving this work in 2026 are stable and clear. OSHA's 29 CFR 1910.95 requires a hearing conservation program for employees exposed at or above 85 dBA over 8 hours, built on monitoring, audiometric testing, protection, training, and recordkeeping. Meanwhile, teleaudiology and automated, AI-assisted audiometry are expanding access to hearing testing where specialists are scarce — a natural fit for bringing testing directly to the workplace. The direction of the field favors exactly the on-site, well-documented model this book describes.

For a facility, the practical need is a program that both protects staff and produces the records to prove it: consistent audiometry, defensible conditions, and continuous documentation, delivered on-site with minimal operational impact. Noise-induced hearing loss is permanent once it happens and preventable if you act — so the entire value of the program is in acting consistently, testing reliably, and keeping the records that show you did. Prevention you can prove: that is the whole job.

References

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ABOUT THE FOUNDER

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Devin Lockett is the founder and entrepreneur behind this title and the wider BiomedRx family of companies-spanning healthcare technology, wellness, media, and community initiatives. He builds brands focused on quality, service, and independent ownership.