

altered lives project

Richard's Story

Richard is a long-time employee at a manufacturing facility in South Eastern Ontario. Over his years of employment there, Richard suffered two significant injuries. He had the last joint of his baby finger on his right hand amputated when he was 29 years old. More recently, a doctor diagnosed Richard with significant noise-induced hearing loss.

The accident that took part of his finger happened in a packaging machine. The injury was very painful and required two surgeries, including removal of his fingernail, which had grown through the closed wound. Fortunately, he is left-hand dominant. But, to this day, Richard finds it difficult to grip and pick up things with his right hand, and he sometimes has phantom pain. What bothers Richard the most is that the finger is very sensitive to cold since the bone is just below the skin. Typically, he wears gloves most of the day in winter.

Richard wasn't the only worker to sustain hand injuries in that way. As a result of his injury though, the employer installed additional guarding on that type of machinery.

More recently, Richard received a diagnosis of significant noise-induced hearing loss. So, now he requires hearing aids. While Richard did suspect he had some hearing loss, it didn't hit home until his employer advised him to seek medical attention due to results of a workplace test. Specialists confirmed the diagnosis.

Richard's work environment is very noisy with levels varying between 85 dB(A) and 105 dB(A). In Ontario, the maximum permitted exposure levels for 8 hours is 85 dB(A).

Throughout his years at the facility, Richard wore hearing protection. He also wore hearing protection during at home activities like mowing the lawn, using a chainsaw, or working in his workshop.

Prior to getting hearing aids, Richard had difficulty hearing



things properly, which frustrated him and his family. In addition, he found background noises distracting and he would try to watch mouths to understand what others said. He recalls no longer hearing the high notes in music either. Hearing aids have helped a lot, but they are not without problems. Often, background noises can be more amplified than expected.

Richard has a significant hearing loss at a young age and he has had difficulty accepting it. He is not an old man and he worries what his hearing be like in another 20 years.

Richard's advice: "Don't assume someone else is looking out for you. Follow proper procedures, don't take short cuts, and be aware of your surroundings at all times. Tools are replaceable, your fingers are not."

"My employer has been active in trying to reduce employee exposure to the noise hazard. Workers should request this of their employers they recognize a health hazard. Use personal protection wherever it is required, not just at work, and have your hearing tested. You need to preserve what you have. Lastly, I want to remind kids of the dangers of constantly wearing ear buds too."

**International Noise
Awareness Day is April 25.**
For more info visit
ohcow.on.ca/avoidnoise