



HEARING TESTING: When to Bring Your Program In-House and When to Outsource

Find the right approach to decrease costs and strengthen OSHA compliance

Most hearing conservation programs (HCPs) begin with outsourced testing, typically bringing mobile testing units with sound booths on-site or sending employees to an off-site clinic annually. In contrast, employers who conduct boothless in-house testing have an automated audiometer on-site year-round, allowing them to test in any noise-compliant location, like an office or conference room, whenever it suits their operations.

For some employers, outsourced testing will always align with operations, but many experience friction that reduces the effectiveness of their HCP. For these employers, bringing testing in-house provides greater control over their program, including scheduling, data management, and consistency across locations. The following three questions will help you determine whether outsourcing is the best fit for your program, or if bringing testing in-house would strengthen your HCP and reduce OSHA compliance gaps.

How Large Is the Scope of Your Hearing Conservation Program?

Organizations with fewer than 50 employees exposed at or above the 85 dBA TWA action level typically find outsourced testing cost-effective and manageable, particularly if workers are on a single day shift and can be tested in one annual session. A single test date is easy to coordinate, and sending employees off-site for missed tests and retests remains manageable.

When there are over 50 employees in an HCP, logistics are more complex. Scheduling is more difficult; sending employees for testing is more disruptive to operations, and managing missed tests and retests is more challenging. Maintaining oversight across a larger workforce is more difficult, increasing the risk of employees falling through annual testing cycles and creating compliance gaps. In this case, in-house testing is simpler, more cost-effective, and a stronger choice for staying compliant.

Are You Managing Testing Across Multiple Sites?

A single-site program with a small workforce may be well suited to outsourcing. However, outsourcing multi-site programs can introduce logistical challenges. Each site may use different hearing testing providers with varying protocols and reporting formats, making it hard to maintain a uniform, compliant program.

Remote or rural sites add another constraint. Scheduling a mobile testing van for a remote facility is often costly or unavailable, and clinics may be far for employees to travel, further increasing program costs. When managing multiple sites, in-house testing is the more practical and consistent approach.

How Important Is Data Ownership and Accessibility?

If your current provider delivers clean records, tracks baselines reliably, and you've never struggled to retrieve a historical audiogram for an OSHA audit, data management may not be a reason to change.

If you've experienced friction, such as delayed results, gaps in employee testing histories, difficulty confirming follow-up actions for standard threshold shifts, or uncertainty heading into an audit, that's a signal your data isn't working for your program. Another consideration is that if a testing partner closes or a supervising audiologist retires, records may become inaccessible, creating compliance risk.

By managing testing in-house, you can have direct access to employee records, rather than relying on third parties. However, not all in-house solutions provide the same level of data access and visibility. When evaluating options, ensure your data is centralized, accessible, and provides clear visibility into results, follow-up actions, and testing history across your program.

Choosing the Right In-House Solution

Tablet-based, boothless audiometers have made in-house testing more accessible and cost-effective. OSHA-compliant audiometric testing no longer requires a sound booth; all you need is a noise-compliant room. When selecting a solution, consider the following:

- **OSHA and ANSI compliance:**
Confirm the audiometer meets ANSI S3.6 and supports key hearing conservation requirements, including standard threshold shift detection, proactive calibration, and required frequency testing.
- **Continuous ambient noise monitoring:**
While only a single ambient noise check is required at the start of the testing day, OSHA has endorsed continuous noise monitoring in a letter of interpretation. Look for a system that monitors throughout testing and pauses when background noise exceeds permissible levels, helping reduce retests and maintain confidence in results.

- **Data management and security:**

Results should sync to a secure, HIPAA-compliant portal with reporting, baseline tracking, and audit-ready records. Look for a solution with ISO 27001 certification, the highest-level, globally accepted standard for Information Security Management Systems (ISMS).

- **Support and calibration services:**

Choose a partner that offers onboarding, training, and proactive calibration management.

Which approach works best depends on your program's size, geography, data demands, and scheduling constraints. For many organizations, outsourcing remains practical. For larger or more complex HCPs, in-house testing with the right technology gives you the control needed to maintain a consistent, compliant program.

Learn more about how you can transform your occupational hearing testing program with SHOEBOX's award-winning, tablet-based, boothless audiometer.

Visit www.shoebox.md or email us at salesoccupationalhealth@shoebox.md to take the first step.

