

McCallum ETY Earplugs

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I was kindly given a set of McCallum Bagpipes ear plugs by the School of Piping Principal, Brett Tidswell, and asked to trial and review them. The official spiel on this product from McCallum Bagpipes is as follows:

“ETY Plugs HD are the world’s highest definition ready-fit earplugs. They reduce most noise to safe levels while preserving the clarity of speech and environmental sounds. ETY Plugs HD are configured to replicate the natural response of the ear canal so that when sound enters the earplug, it is reproduced unchanged, exactly the same as the ear would hear it, only quieter.”

Features

- *High-definition hearing protection*
- *Comfortable, 3-flange fit designed to seal the ear*
- *Reusable and long lasting*
- *Detachable cord to prevent loss*
- *Available in 2 sizes* — standard and large”*

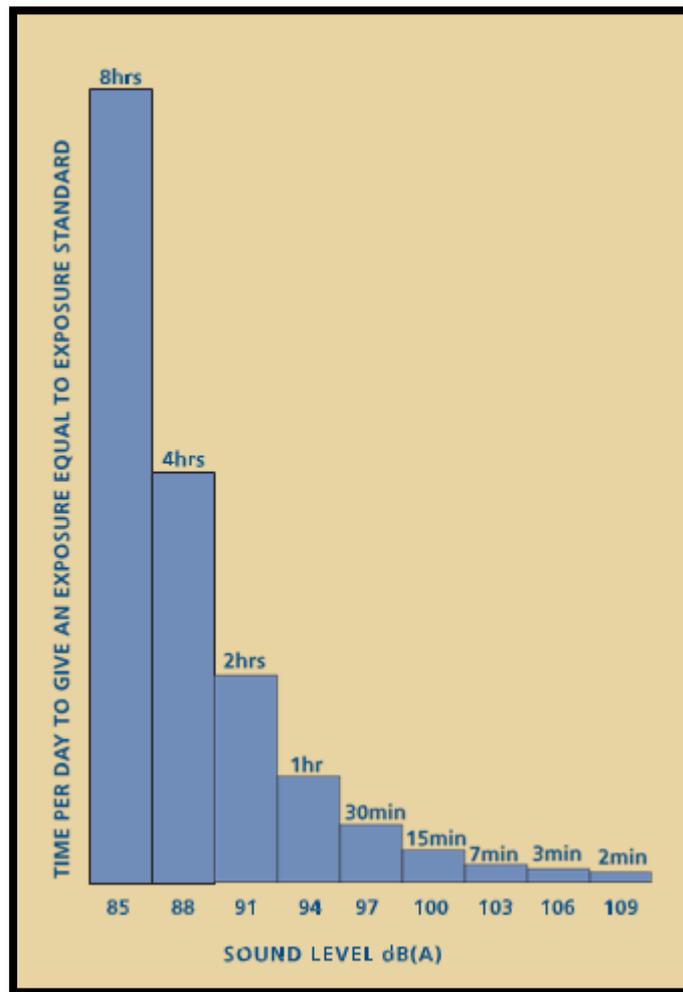
In doing this review justice, I’ve felt it necessary to draw from my profession (Occupational Health and Safety) to help demonstrate what an important addition to any piper’s case a good set of ear plugs is.

As people respond differently to ‘noise’, the level at which noise will start to cause damage is not known. The amount of damage caused by noise depends on the total amount of energy received over time. This means, as noise becomes louder it causes damage in less time. For example, a 3dB(A) increase in noise level will produce twice the energy output and cause the same damage in half the time.

The first sign of noise-induced hearing loss is often the difficulty to hear high-pitched sounds, such as consonants (e.g. ‘t’, ‘d’, ‘s’) and the voices of women and children. When more than one person is speaking or there is a background noise, the problem becomes worse.

Figure 1 shows the different exposure times for different sound levels, all equivalent to exposures of 85dB(A) for eight hours. For example, two minutes of working in noise levels of 109dB(A) may cause the same damage as eight hours working in 85 dB(A).

Figure 1



Okay, in piping terms what does all this mean? Well, we can assume that the typical noise exposure for a piper, who practices alone indoors, is around the 103dB - 106dB range.....now do I have your attention....?

Now consider what a full indoors band practice is like on your hearing, complete with a drum corps. You can start to see that anyone who is exposed to such noise levels on a regular basis is going to inevitably suffer permanent hearing loss to some degree. I think back to all the practice I've done without wearing ear plugs and can easily attest as to why I have personally suffered permanent damage. I struggle to hear people talking in noisy venues, and it's often pointed out to me that I turn my head and favor my right ear when people address me. Not the sort of piping legacy I wish to further!

McCallum Bagpipes have introduced an ear plug that is a cut above the generic foam plugs that we see everywhere. In addition to providing a safer practice experience, these ear plugs are better than the 'run of the mill' types because they act like a volume control without eliminating the spectrum of sound that the regular plugs do. For pipers, this is extremely important for intonation purposes. You can still hear the instrument's timbre in full, plus also the technique you're trying to hone, only at a more tolerable and safe noise level.

This product is not just for some of us; it should be mandated for all of us! As a musician, your hearing is everything. Why knowingly damage it when you can avoid it? It makes no sense to ignore the risks associated with the dangerous noise levels that we are all aware of. Put simply, you will inevitably suffer hearing loss if you don't wear any protection when playing your pipes – be that indoors or even in certain outdoor situations. It's a given. Through McCallum Bagpipes – a highly reputable company – acknowledge this and offer a control measure that will reduce the risks. This is a 'must' for all pipers (and drummers). If you're a teacher of piping or leading a group/band, insist that your charges wear them. This is really about 'duty of care' and quality of life above all else. Get some!



McCallum ETY Earplugs are available from many stockists including the School of Piping Shop. Email us at schoolofpiping@gmail.com to order.



articles, reviews, sound files
photo albums, audio lessons
news, historic information
and more
for the piper at every level!

www.schoolofpiping.com