



Arc Rated Earplugs Are Not Required in Most Situations

Did you know that arc rated earplugs are not specifically called out in the NFPA 70E standard (for arc flash exposures)?

Oberon conducted acoustical testing on its products in February of 2004. The results indicate that an arc-rated hood can significantly attenuate the sound hazard (lessen the noise), but since the sound level for an arc flash event is so high, the worker using an arc-rated hood still needs to use hearing protection. NFPA 70E requires hearing protection for Hazard Risk Categories 2, 3, and 4. That is why Oberon includes a set of earplugs in each complete arc flash PPE kit.

NFPA 70E describes hearing protection as ear canal inserts. Full muff type (covers ear) would also be acceptable as long as they fit properly under the hood. It would not be necessary to use arc-rated earplugs for Categories 2*, 3, and 4 because NFPA 70E requires you to wear a hood at these Hazard Risk Category levels (*some level 2 scenarios only use a face shield). The arc-rated hood, tested under ASTM 2178, would not allow enough energy to be transmitted through the hood to ignite or melt the earplugs or muff type hearing protection. For Categories 1 and 2, where NFPA 70E does not mandate the use of a hood, Oberon suggests considering using an arc-rated earplug.

With that said, we always like to recommend that employees use a “balaclava” when they use an arc-rated shield with hardhat. What good is protecting the front of your face if the side of your head and neck line is exposed!