

3.0 THE ROLE OF HEARING IN DRIVING

The effect of impaired hearing on driving safely is still controversial. The best available information suggests that totally deaf private vehicle drivers (class 5) do have an increased accident risk but unfortunately there is no reliable data available to show how great the hearing loss must be before an increase in the accident rate of hearing impaired drivers is detectable. There are so few drivers with impaired hearing employed as operators of cargo transport or passenger-carrying vehicles, that there is no reliable data either to support or refute the ability of persons with reduced hearing to drive commercial vehicles safely.

Passenger bus and taxi drivers must be able to hear well enough to talk to their passengers. For the passengers safety it would also seem reasonable to expect that bus and taxi drivers should be able to hear well enough to detect external warning sounds such as sirens, horns, or bells. Truck drivers on the other hand, even with normal hearing, often have great difficulty detecting any warning sounds coming from outside of their cab because of the noise of the engine and the sound proofing that is found with increasing frequency in modern truck cabs. This has led some people to conclude that total deafness would present no safety hazard. Experienced drivers, however, have expressed the opinion that the ability to hear does help them with the driving task and have been reluctant to support the position that a totally deaf driver can drive just as safely as a driver who has at least some hearing.

3.1 RECOMMENDED HEARING STANDARDS

The following recommended hearing standards are intended to be used by physicians as a guideline for reporting drivers with hearing loss to the Superintendent of Motor Vehicles. Where professional driving is involved, the extent of the driver's hearing loss is one factor considered by Superintendent in making a decision with respect to fitness to drive.

The following table represents the proposed hearing standards:

Class	Hearing Requirement
Class 5	None
Class 1 – 4 with Restriction 16 and 37	None
Class 1 – 4 without Restriction 16 and 37	40 db or less, averaged at 500, 1,000 and 2,000 Hz in their better ear corrected or uncorrected. If hearing aid required to meet standard, add Restriction 23.
Restriction 16 – Not permitted to operate Class 2 or 4 Restriction 23 – Must wear hearing aid Restriction 37 – Not permitted to transport dangerous goods	

3.2 MEASUREMENT OF HEARING LOSS

3.2.1 If a hearing impairment is suspected, persons who are applying for a licence to drive a passenger carrying vehicle or heavy bus or truck (class 1, 2, 3 or 4) should be referred to an Otolaryngologist, Audiologist or to a Hearing Clinic operated by the B.C. Ministry of Health for a pure tone audiogram.

3.2.2 Taxicab drivers who use a hearing aid must be tested in a sound field by the I.S.O. standard method

3.3 VESTIBULAR DISORDERS

A loss of the sense of balance can seriously affect driving ability. Patients with acute labyrinthitis or positional vertigo with horizontal head movement should be advised not to drive at all until their condition has subsided or responded to treatment. Patients who are subject to recurrent attacks of vertigo that occur without warning, should also not drive any type of vehicle until it is certain that their spells of dizziness have been controlled or have abated.