

Ear Protection for Dogs in Helicopters

Dr. William Grant:

We looked at ear protection years ago primarily with police canines that do routinely fly and train in helicopters. The concussion did not seem to cause any problems. This was possibly due to the type of helicopters i.e. smaller helicopters. I have been involved in military exercises, several years ago, and we discussed the issue and as long as the dogs were not in the direct prop wash the concussion is minimal.

I guess if you had a large transport helicopter and were directly in the prop wash it could be an issue.

Lieutenant Colonel Brglez

I have been asked that question concerning hearing protection when I was in Bosnia in 2001. When I did ask around and the answer I got was dogs did not need hearing protection.

Major Janice Baker

We don't routinely do anything to protect hearing for dogs on helicopters. Laura Miller, an Army colleague, has done some surveillance of hearing in dogs pre and post deployment and found no real evidence of hearing loss. However, we know from just observing them that some dogs are bothered (behaviorally) by the noise associated with helicopters, so hearing loss is not the only occupational hazard with engine and rotor noise. In those dogs, some of the handlers place a balaclava over the dog's head to fold his ears down while allowing him to see, and this seems to help calm some of them down- so making the assumption that something about the loudness, pitch, or frequency of the noise bothers them. We've tried cotton ear plugs as well but they don't tolerate these well.

No one has studied this specifically in the past that we know of, but we are not seeing significant hearing loss and suspect that is due to the dogs' long ear canals compared to those of humans. We have had a few dogs with ruptured tympanic membranes from blast overpressure, but not really related to chronic noise like with a helicopter.

Major George Clinton

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We really haven't seen any cases of dogs having hearing issues from helicopter rides. The issues usually come from other combat issues like being near gun fire, a blast or huge explosion. Helicopters usually aren't the issue. We reached out to some other folks asking the same question and they haven't seen any issues from helicopters either.