

# Vuvuzela unPlugged... with a warning...

With only a few days to go to the kick off, World Cup fever is reaching a crescendo. South African fans are showing their gees by decorating their cars, their houses and offices with flags, decking themselves out in their team's soccer shirts, buying makarapas and, of course, practicing their vuvuzela-blowing skills. There's another side to the vuvuzela, however - if fans are not careful, they won't be able to hear a thing when they watch the *next* world cup on TV.

FIFA Local Organising Committee CEO, Danny Jordaan, has said that "This will be the noisiest World Cup ever", and a lot of noise has certainly been made about the potentially damaging effect that vuvuzelas could have on spectators' hearing at World Cup matches. Newly released research has shown that the noise emitted from a single vuvuzela is dangerously loud and that the combined effect of the thousands of vuvuzelas expected at the matches could pose a considerable risk for noise-induced hearing loss.

Uthango Social Investments identified a quite simple and logical solution by teaming up with a medical doctor in Cape Town, and advocating for Vuvuzela unPlugged earplugs as an enhancer of the VIBE by reducing the NOISE. Not only can these earplugs preserve the hearing of soccer fans, but also the spirit that the vuvuzela creates.

## Plug them!

Recently, local entrepreneur Neil van Schalkwyk of Masincedane Sport - the innovator responsible for bringing the vuvuzela to the South African market through the mass manufacture of the colourful, plastic version of the traditional African instrument, has formed a partnership with Uthango, expressing his belief that this global event should benefit African-based organisations and small enterprises directly. In recognising the need for fans to protect their hearing, Van Schalkwyk has been instrumental in obtaining accreditation for the sale of Uthango's Vuvuzela unPlugged earplugs at 14 Park and Ride facilities around stadiums in Cape Town and Johannesburg at R25 per set. The earplugs are also on sale at [www.webtickets.co.za](http://www.webtickets.co.za) and will continue as a social enterprise of Uthango after the World Cup.

In addition to protecting hearing and preserving gees, the earplugs have an important socio-economic impact as they are manufactured and assembled by 120 South Africans with disabilities who earn a direct income from this initiative. The money made from the sales of the earplugs also contributes to Uthango's operating expenses as a thought-leader in social innovation and pro-poor African development.

For further information go to [www.vuvuzelaunplugged.com](http://www.vuvuzelaunplugged.com).

## World Cup fans warned: Vuvuzela could damage your hearing

South African football fans' instrument of choice, the vuvuzela, has already caused controversy ahead of the World Cup

with authorities concerned that their excessive volume could prevent people from hearing announcements should a stadium need to be evacuated. Now, new tests have shown that the instrument is so loud it poses a more immediate health risk to fans and players.

The vuvuzela was found to emit an ear piercing noise of 127 decibels - louder than a lawnmower (90 dB) and a chainsaw (100 dB). Extended exposure at just 85 decibels puts us at a risk of permanent noise induced hearing loss. When subjected to 100 dB or more, hearing damage can occur in just 15 minutes.

## Once your hearing is damaged, that's it!

The most popular football fan instruments from across the world were tested in a soundproof studio as part of Hear the World, a global initiative by leading hearing system manufacturer Phonak to raise awareness about the importance of hearing and the consequences of hearing loss.

Second most harmful to our ears was the air-horn, popular with English football fans, which exposes our ears to damage-inducing levels of 123.6 dB. This was followed by the drum, which reached a level of 122 decibels.

Popular with supporters on the stands as well as being used on the pitch, the referee's whistle was the fourth most harmful to our ears at 121.8 dB, but passionate fans alone can be just as problematic - two singing supporters reached 121.6 dB.

Robert Beiny, UK and European Audiologist of the Year said: "To put it in perspective, when a sound is increased by ten decibels our ears perceive it as being twice as loud, so we would consider the vuvuzela to be more than double the volume of the cowbell."

Deafening	
Vuvuzela	127 dB
Air-horn	123.6 dB
Samba drum	122.2 dB
Referee whistle	121.8 dB
2 fans singing	121.6 dB
Gas horn	121.4 dB
Cowbell	114.9 dB
Wooden rattle	108.2 dB
Inflatable Fan-Sticks	99.1 dB

## Prevention is key

He continues: "It's not just while sitting in the stands at a match that hearing damage can happen. Our ears can be exposed to damaging noise levels when in the pub surrounded by excited cheering fans, or even while at home, with people often turning the sound on their television up very loud in order to create an atmosphere when watching from their sofa.

"My advice to fans would be to enjoy the atmosphere that the World Cup creates, but also to consider their hearing. Give your ears a break from the noisy atmosphere at half time, or if you are one of the lucky ones heading to a live game, remember to take some earplugs along - once the damage is done it is irreversible, so prevention is key."

## Protection is available - use it

Valentin Chaperro, chief executive of Phonak said: "Of course the sound of the crowd plays a major part in creating the atmosphere in a football stadium. But people should remember that prolonged exposure to loud noises can have a big impact therefore, it is imperative that we take conscious measures to protect our hearing before it's too late."

There are many hearing protection devices available, from formable foam plugs to ear-muffs and banded ear-plugs, but custom-made ear-plugs differ from these in one important respect - they are manufactured individually for the ear canal of

their user. From an impression of the ear canal, an ear-plug is manufactured to seal that particular ear canal fully. In some custom-moulded ear-plug products, the sound attenuation is determined by the attenuating action of the integral filter, and can therefore be selected within certain limits according to the noise exposure level.

To locate a hearing health professional in your area, take an online hearing screening and for tips on preventing hearing loss, visit [www.hear-the-world.com/za](http://www.hear-the-world.com/za) or call the hearing helpline on 0861-10-20-30.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>