

STOP AND THINK TALK

A briefing tool for managers

NOISE

Hearing loss caused by work is preventable, but once your hearing has gone it will not come back. Some **170,000 people** in the UK suffer deafness, ringing in the ears or other ear conditions caused by excessive noise at work.

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 (the Noise Regulations) came into force for all industry sectors in Great Britain on 6 April 2006. The aim of the Noise Regulations is to ensure that workers' hearing is protected from excessive noise at their place of work, which could cause them to lose their hearing and/or to suffer from tinnitus (permanent ringing in the ears). The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 replace the Noise at Work Regulations 1989.



Types of Hearing Protection



SYMPTOMS OF HEARING LOSS

- Conversation becomes difficult or impossible
- Your family complains about the television being too loud
- You have trouble using the telephone
- You find it difficult to catch sounds like 't', 'd' and 's', so you confuse similar words
- Permanent tinnitus (ringing, whistling, buzzing or humming in the ears) can also be caused

Generally hearing loss is gradual. By the time you notice it, it is probably too late. You can also suffer instant damage from very loud or explosive noises.

We want to prevent hearing loss before it happens.

How Much Noise?

The level at which employers must provide hearing protection and hearing protection zones is now 85 decibels (daily or weekly average exposure) and the level at which employers must assess the risk to workers' health and provide them with information and training is now 80 decibels. There is also an exposure limit value of 87 decibels, taking account of any reduction in exposure provided by hearing protection, above which workers must not be exposed.

How is noise measured?

Noise is measured in decibels (dB). An 'A-weighting' sometimes written as 'dB(A)', is used to measure average noise levels, and a 'C-weighting' or 'dB(C)', to measure peak, impact or explosive noises. Every 3 dB doubles the noise, so what might seem like small differences in the numbers can be quite significant.

NOISE LEVELS (Decibels)



STOP AND THINK TALK

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Preparation

This stop and think talk can be used individually or with a group of people. Participants should receive a copy of the talk for their CPD files as well as signing the training declaration. It is suggested that before delivering this training that a tour of the site is conducted and participants asked to identify the various sources of noise for discussion in the classroom.

Introduction (After reading out the case studies)

Noise levels and peoples tolerance to them is a personal matter, however, there are legal noise levels where defined action must be taken. There are many noise emissions that are below regulatory action levels that could be classed as nuisance, these should also be identified and where possible action taken for the well being of the individuals affected.

THE TALK

Use the questions below to open the discussion under each heading and then go through the lists explaining in detail each hazard / control and what is expected

Hazards

Question 1 – What are the sources of Noise that can present a hazard in the workplace?

- Mobile Plant / Vehicles
- Machinery:
 - Crushers
 - Screens
 - Conveyors
 - Crash Boxes / Material Transfer Points
 - Drills
 - Breakers / Hammers
 - Mixers
 - Vibrators
 - Saws
- Blasting
- Construction & Demolition Works
- Off Site Noise: Traffic, Aircraft, Trains, Adjacent Works etc.

Question 2 – What are the key “action” levels for Noise?

- 80 Decibels (Average Exposure) – Advisory level at which hearing protection should be provided and employees informed – LOWER ACTION LEVEL
 - 85 Decibels (Average Exposure) – Level where hearing protection is mandatory and measures should be taken to reduce levels as far as is reasonable – UPPER ACTION LEVEL
 - 87 Decibels (Average Exposure) – Level above which workers must not be exposed after taking into account the reduction in exposure provided by hearing protection
- Note: Every 3 Decibel increase in noise is actually a doubling of that noise

Risk Assessment

Question 3 – What action must the employer take in relation to noise levels?

- Reduce noise levels to below the upper action level
- Provide information and hearing protection where levels exceed the lower action level
- Clearly identify areas where hearing protection must be worn
- Ensure hearing protection is worn where required

- Instruct and inform employees on the risks from noise and the measures they need to take to protect their hearing

Question 4 – What action must the employee take in relation to noise levels?

- Wear protection where instructed
- Use equipment properly and look after it
- Report any defects in protection equipment
- Bring to the employers notice any concerns relating to noise

Controls

Question 5 – What controls can be put in place?

- Replace noisy equipment with quieter equivalents
- Double glazed windows on buildings
- Site noisy equipment away from people
- Enclose noisy equipment in sound proofing materials
- Designated noise zones
- Warning signs
- Work rotation to limit exposure
- Periodic noise surveys
- Ear defenders (always last resort but often necessary) etc.

Question 6 – What other measures can be taken?

- Advice on Noise and its potential health implications including noise hazards away from the workplace:
- Health Surveillance - where hearing loss can be identified and action taken to reduce exposure if required

REMEMBER – Hearing loss cannot be reversed so avoid excessive continuous noise and protect yourself where necessary.

AND FINALLY . . .

- Clarify any points as required.
- Ask if there are any other safety related issues that should be discussed.
- Get everyone to sign the training declaration.
- Thank everyone for their participation

