

Noise at Work Guidance

Noise

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 provides a legal framework to protect people from the effects of prolonged exposure to excessive noise levels in the workplace.

What is noise?

The Regulations define noise as 'any audible sound'.

In non-legal terms noise is usually defined as 'any unwanted sound'.

Useful Definitions

dB	decibel, a measure of sound
dB(A)	decibel with an A- weighted average, which reflects how the hearing mechanism of the body works
Lep,d	a daily personal noise exposure level
1st Action Level	a Lep,d of 80dB or a peak sound pressure level of 135dB
2nd Action Level	a Lep,d of 85dB or a peak sound pressure level of 137dB
Exposure Limit Values	a Lep,d of 87dB or a peak sound level pressure of 140dB

Noise and Hearing

Sounds and noises are an important part of everyday life. In moderation they are harmless, but if they are too loud they can damage your hearing either temporarily or permanently. The tissue in the inner ear, which includes hair cells, can be damaged just like any other tissue. The danger depends on how loud the noise is and how long you are exposed to it. The damage builds up gradually and you may not notice changes from one day to another, but once the damage is done there is no cure.

The effects may include:

- sounds and speech become muffled so that it is hard to tell similar sounding words apart, e.g. 'bit' & 'tip', or to pick out a voice in a crowd;
- permanent ringing in the ears (called tinnitus);
- a distorted sense of loudness, e.g. asking people to speak up, then complain that they are shouting;
- needing to turn up the television too loud, or finding it hard to use the telephone.

You should not have to suffer damage of this sort because of noise at work.

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Key responsibilities of Regulations:

Employer's duties include:

- general duty to reduce risk to lowest level reasonably practicable;
- assess the levels of exposure;
- record assessments;
- control noise to reduce the risk of damage to employee's hearing;
- provide suitable ear protection - upon request at 1st action level;
 - to all who are exposed at 2nd action level;
- mark any 'Ear Protection Zones';
- ensure the exposure limit values are not exceeded (any attenuation provided by hearing protection may be taken into account)
- ensure equipment provided is maintained and used;
- provide adequate information, instruction and training.

Employee's duties include:

- Use any noise control equipment provided;
- Use ear protectors all the time you are exposed to loud noise;
- Report any defects with noise control equipment.
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Typical noise levels

Activity/Object	Approx. Noise Level [dB(A)]
Whispering	30
Bird Singing	45
Typing	70
Vacuuming	80
Grass Cutting	95
Aeroplane/Pneumatic Hammer	115
Pain Threshold	130

DO'S for ear protectors

Do wear ear protectors whenever you go into specially marked Ear Protection Zones.

Do wear ear protectors in the right way, making sure that:

- seals on ear-muffs fit tightly round the ear;
- long hair or clothing is kept out from under the seal. If possible use ear-plugs if you wear glasses as the frames make the seals leak;
- ear-plugs are clean and put into the ear properly.

Do look after your ear protectors.

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- Store them in the proper place when you are not wearing them.
- Look out for splits or cracks in the seal.
- Hand in any damaged ear protectors so that they can be replaced.

Do keep ear protectors clean. Damaged, dirty protectors won't work properly and could cause an ear infection.

DON'TS for ear protectors

Don't take your ear protectors off where it is noisy, even for a short time, or even if they feel hot or uncomfortable. It doesn't take much noise to damage your hearing.

Don't share or reuse disposable ear-plugs. They will not work well and may be dirty.

Don't overstretch the headband on ear-muffs. They will go out of shape and not work properly.

Don't be put off wearing ear-muffs. The more people wear them, the more normal it will become.

Don't think you can get used to noise.

Don't neglect your hearing. If you think there is something wrong with your hearing see your doctor or occupational health department.

Author	Document
Health & Safety Executive	Noise at Work: Advice for Employers
Health & Safety Executive	Noise at Work: Advice for Employees

In the event of a manager perceiving a problem with noise, then they should contact the Occupational Hygienist on 0141 211 2344 or by emailing Peter.Heron@ggc.scot.nhs.uk.