

H8 – Opening Statement

Control of Noise at Work

Over one million employees in Great Britain are exposed to levels of noise which put their hearing at risk.

Noise at work can cause hearing loss that can be temporary or permanent. People often experience temporary deafness after leaving a noisy place. Although hearing recovers within a few hours, this should not be ignored. It is a sign that if you continue to be exposed to the noise your hearing could be permanently damaged. Permanent hearing damage can be caused immediately by sudden, extremely loud, explosive noises, eg from guns or cartridge-operated machines.

Hearing loss is not the only problem. People may develop tinnitus (ringing, whistling, buzzing or humming in the ears), a distressing condition which can lead to disturbed sleep.

This procedure tells you what you should do to assess the noise risk and offer some simple solutions to controlling noise in the workplace.



H8 – Control of Noise at Work

What is this?

This is a written procedure which covers all aspects of identifying, preventing or reducing the risk of excessive exposure to noise in the workplace.

The person responsible for implementing this procedure is:

What we need to do?

The person responsible for implementing this procedure must ensure that:

- A competent person undertakes a noise risk assessment;
- An action plan is developed and followed to implement any recommendations raised in the risk assessment.

Risk assessments must:

- Identify where there may be a risk from noise and who is likely to be affected;
- Contain a reliable estimate of employees' exposure;
- Compare the exposure with the action values and limit values;
- Include a one page summary of exposure for each activity;
- Identify what is needed to comply with the law, e.g. whether noise control measures or hearing protection are needed, and if so, where and of what type;
- Identify any employees who need to be provided with health surveillance and whether any are at particular risk;
- Include a schematic plan for fixed sites identifying the noise control areas.

It is essential that estimates of employees' exposure to noise are representative of the work that they do. It needs to take account of:

- The work they do or are likely to do;
- The ways in which they do the work;
- The time they are doing the work; and
- How it might vary from one day to the next.

The estimate must be based on reliable information, e.g. measurements in the workplace or information from other similar workplaces.



How does a responsible manager know if he/she has a problem?

The main requirements of the regulations apply where exposure is likely to be at or above any of the three action values specified, which are as follows:

- The **Lower Action Value** is a daily or weekly personal noise exposure of **80 dB(A)** and a peak sound pressure of **135 dB(C)**.
- The **Upper Action Value** is a daily or weekly personal noise exposure of **85 dB(A)** and a peak sound pressure of **137dB(C)**.
- The **Exposure Limit Value** is a daily or weekly personal noise exposure of **87dB(A)** and a peak sound pressure of **140 dB(C)**. These exposure limit values take into account any reduction in exposure provided by hearing protection.

Where the exposure of an employee to noise varies markedly from day to day, weekly personal noise exposure in place of daily personal noise exposure for the purpose of compliance with these regulations, can be used.

The noise assessment must state whether an employee or a location is at or above these levels. This will help to determine the type of control measure that is required.

What information needs to be given to employees?

The responsible manager must ensure that employees are given information and training on the following:

- The likely noise exposure and the risk to hearing it presents;
- What is being done to control risks and minimise exposure;
- Where and how they can obtain hearing protection;
- How to report defects in hearing protection and noise control equipment;
- What their duties are under the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005;
- What they should do to minimise the risk, such as the proper way to use hearing protection and other noise control equipment, how to look after it and store it, and where to use it;
- The company health surveillance systems.

Note: Make sure information is communicated in such a way that employees can be expected to understand (for example you might need to make special arrangements if the employee does not understand English or cannot read). Responsible managers have a duty to make contractors and visitors aware of high noise areas.

What do employees have to do?

Employees must:

- Use any noise control measures properly e.g. noise enclosures, and follow any working methods that are put in place;



- Wear any hearing protection issued and wear it properly (employees must be trained how to do this), and make sure they wear it all the time when they are exposed to noisy work within hearing protection areas. Removing hearing protection even for a short while could still lead to hearing damage;
 - Report any damage to the hearing protection that has been issued.
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Consultation

Consulting with trade union appointed safety representatives or other employee representatives is a legal requirement. Responsible managers should discuss with said individuals the noise risk assessment and action plan, including any proposal to use weekly average exposure levels, selection of hearing protection, any hearing protection zones, and the health surveillance programme.

Review

Should changes in plant or a significant process occur a re-assessment will be required. Even if it appears that nothing has changed, a review of the assessment must not be left for more than two years.

Note: A review does not necessarily mean a re-assessment.

Legislation

- HSE Noise at work guide to employers
- The Control of Noise at Work Regulations and ACOP 2005

Note: This list is by no means exhaustive but identifies some of the key pieces of legislation associated with noise at work.

