

NOISE

References:

- A. Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.
- B. Control of Noise at Work Regulations (as amended).
- C. Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (as amended).

Introduction

11.1 Noise has been described as unwanted sound, which may be distracting, annoying or cause physical damage to the body (e.g. temporary or permanent hearing damage). The Control of Noise at Work Regulations are intended to protect against risks to health and safety from exposure to noise, risk of hearing damage and other risks such as interference with the employee's ability to hear instructions or warnings.

11.2 Where employees or others are exposed at or above the second action value, i.e. 85dB(A), departments must draw up a planned programme of noise control measures. The immediate risk can be managed by the provision of hearing protection. However departments should identify short and long term targets to reduce noise exposure, draft a timetable for implementation of the noise control measures and assign responsibilities to individuals to deliver relevant parts of the plan. Typical examples are when working within the vicinity of:

- Highway Machinery and Plant.
- Running generators.
- Hedge/grass cutters.
- Running vehicle engines when fixing or fault finding.
- Printing equipment.

Assessment of exposure

11.3 "Noisy" areas, work activities or processes where there is likely to be risk from noise exposure must be assessed by a trained person. An assessment will also be required where noise becomes intrusive for most of the working day or where employees have to raise their voices to hold a normal conversation 2m away from each other.

Protection Methods

11.4 Where necessary, departments must put in place appropriate noise control measures, which should eliminate the risks, where this is reasonably practicable. Where this is not possible then risks should be reduced to as low as reasonably practical by engineering means and management controls.

- Separation of noisy areas by segregating machines and processes etc.
- Provision of screens and partitions.
- Soundproofing of the area.
- High standards of maintenance on silencers and exhaust systems.
- Enclosure of the noise.
- Good maintenance of machinery and soundproofing.

Control of exposure to noise must not be via hearing protection alone.

Signage-Hearing protection zones

11.5 Hearing protection zones should be designated in any area for which hearing protection is required, i.e. in areas where exposure to noise is above the upper action value of 85dB(A). The area must be clearly marked "Ear Protection Zone" and suitable signs posted to indicate that hearing protection is mandatory in these areas. Provision must be made for the personal protection of authorised visitors.

Labelling noisy machines

11.6 Where machine operators are required to wear ear protection because noise exposure is at or above 85db(A), a sign must be posted on the machine.

New machinery/equipment/plant

11.7 All new machinery, equipment or plant must be designed and constructed to ensure that the noise produced is as low as possible, with a 'Declaration of Conformity' to show that it meets the required health and safety requirements.

11.8 Suppliers should be asked to provide information about noise emissions under actual working conditions, as well as any specific instructions for installation and assembly that reduce noise.

Hearing protection

11.9 Where employees are exposed to noise levels at or above 80db(A), but below 85db(A), they are entitled to request ear protection. Information, instruction and training on the risk of damage to hearing from the equipment, a process or activity should be provided by the department and should include information about any hearing protection provided, where and how it should be used and the proper way to clean, store and maintain it.

11.10 Hearing protectors must be suitable for the environment, comfortable for the wearer and compatible with other personal protective equipment such as hard hats, respirators or eye protection. Further information and advice on ear protection is available from the Health and Safety Manager.

11.11 When hearing protection is issued for Personal Protection there is a legal responsibility for the employee to wear it as instructed.

Occupational Health Surveillance

11.12 Employees regularly exposed to noise levels at or above the second action value, will automatically be included in a health surveillance programme.

Documentation

11.13 Records of audiometric tests are to be retained by the occupational health provider; any concerns will be notified to the employee and the health and safety manager.