

Sound Matters

Occupational Noise

Information Sheet

A practical guide to managing noise exposure at work. It is written for employers and employees to raise awareness and control the risk of workplace noise. It is applicable to all sectors.



Noise - what is it, and who is at risk?

Noise is any loud sound that is unwanted and potentially harmful. Everyone exposed to noise in the workplace is potentially at risk.

The higher the noise level and the longer you are exposed to it, the more you are at risk of suffering ill effects from noise. Repeated exposure to high noise levels can damage your hearing and hearing loss is usually permanent.

Noise can be generated by processes and equipment such as powered tools or machinery.

Exposure to excessive noise can result in Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL), which is often accompanied by tinnitus, which can be described as a constant ringing sound in the ear.

Top tip

You may be at risk if:

- You must shout to be clearly heard by someone two meters away
- Your ears are still ringing after leaving the workplace

Health effects

Effects on hearing can be temporary or permanent. Temporary deafness and continued exposure to noise could cause permanent hearing loss. Noise can also cause other health problems such as stress and fatigue.

What the law says

Chapter 1 of Part 5 of the Safety, Health & Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 outlines noise levels (lower and upper exposure action values*) above which employers must complete a risk assessment and implement measures to reduce noise. It also outlines the exposure limit values* which must not be exceeded.

Employer responsibilities

To manage the risk of noise at work employers must:

1. Identify areas of high noise and prepare a noise risk assessment undertaken by a competent person/s.
2. Reduce noise exposure in the workplace through appropriate controls, e.g., screens or barriers.
3. Make health surveillance available to employees where necessary.
4. Consult with employees and safety representatives.
5. Provide employees with information, instruction, and training on workplace noise.
6. Ensure noise exposure limit values are not exceeded.
7. Provide employees with hearing protection, where the noise exposure cannot be reduced using other methods.

* Noise is measured in decibels (dB). The lower exposure action values are 80dB(A) and 135dB(C) peak sound pressure; the upper exposure action values are 85dB(A) and 137dB(C); the exposure limit values are 87dB(A) and 140dB(C).

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Together the employer and employee have responsibility to cooperate on the supply, maintenance, and storage of PPE. It is important to select the most suitable hearing protection because overprotection may mean that your employees can't hear necessary instructions, for example, fire alarm and/or instruction from another person.

The employer must:

1. Provide suitable hearing protection.
2. Ensure employees wear hearing protection where appropriate.
3. Provide training to employees on how to use, fit, care for, and maintain PPE.

Summary of employers duties

	Lower Action Value is exceeded	Upper Action Value is exceeded
Complete a noise risk assessment to identify the sources of the noise and how to control it.	✓	✓
Implement a programme to reduce exposure to noise.	✓	✓
Display mandatory warning signs on the noise level.		✓
Provide hearing protection.	✓	✓
Ensure hearing protection is worn.		✓
Segregate the areas where noise levels are exceeded and restrict access.		✓
Health surveillance:		
Make available hearing checks to employees by a registered medical practitioner.		✓
Make available preventive audiometric testing to employees.	✓	
Provide information, training on noise risks and correct use of hearing protection.	✓	✓

Further information:

www.hsa.ie/eng/topics/physical_agents/

Contact our HelpDesk:
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