

# Noise

Safety Bulletin 29



**You could be risking damage to your hearing permanenting if you work regularly with tools that produce high levels of noise. Hearing loss can reduce over time when being exposed and you may notice when it is too late as the damage can not be reversed.**

Noise exposure results from the use of machinery, power tools, and other industrial equipment, and is a major cause of work-related ill health. Prolonged exposure to high noise levels can damage workers' hearing and may lead to conditions such as noise-induced hearing loss or tinnitus.

Many people are exposed to noise levels at work that may be harmful, leading to permanent and incurable hearing damage. The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 came into force in Great Britain in April 2006 and its aim is to protect workers from the risks associated to being exposed to noise.

By law, employers are required to provide hearing protection and establish hearing protection zones when noise exposure reaches 85 dB(A) as a daily or weekly average. When exposure reaches 80 dB(A), they must assess the risk to workers' health and ensure appropriate information and training are provided. Additionally, there is a maximum exposure limit of 87 dB(A), considering the effect of hearing protection, which must not be exceeded under any circumstances.

**The regulations establish three key sets of noise exposure thresholds:**

- **Lower Exposure Action Values:**
  - Daily or weekly personal noise exposure of 80 dB(A)
  - Peak sound pressure level of 135 dB(C)
- **Upper Exposure Action Values:**
  - Daily or weekly personal noise exposure of 85 dB(A)
  - Peak sound pressure level of 137 dB(C)
- **Exposure Limit Values:**
  - Daily or weekly personal noise exposure of 87 dB(A)
  - Peak sound pressure level of 140 dB(C)

**Operatives should be provided with the correct information, instruction, training along with health surveillance to maintain and protect employees.**



## Do you have a noise problem at work?

This will depend on whether your employees are regularly and frequently exposed to high noise levels, how long they are exposed, and the intensity of the noise. Be alert for the following signs:

- ⌘ If the noise is intrusive and employees are required to raise their voice in order to have a conversation where they are 2 meters apart.
- ⌘ Employees complaining about the level of noise.
- ⌘ Employees not being able to feel certain things with their fingers with the loss of strength in their hands.
- ⌘ If employees use noisy powered tools or machinery for over half an hour a day.
- ⌘ There are noises because of impacts (such as hammering, drop forging, pneumatic impact tools etc), explosive sources such as cartridge-operated tools or detonators, or guns.
- ⌘ The type of work is known to have noisy tasks, eg construction, demolition or road repair; woodworking; plastics processing; engineering; textile manufacture; general fabrication; forging or stamping; paper or board making; canning or bottling; foundries; waste and recycling;



**Hearing loss is preventable — your job shouldn't cost you your hearing.**

Workplace equipment and environments can cause long term damage to your hearing resulting in **permanent hearing loss, tinnitus, difficulty understanding conversations** and can **increase the risk of accidents** due to inability to hearing instructions or warnings and alarms.

Effects can severely **limit the jobs** an affected person is able to do, as well as many **family and social activities**. Noise hearing loss is preventable in the first instance, but once the damage is done it is permanent and in 2021/22 to 2023/4 an estimated number of 12,000 workers suffered with hearing problems.

Where noise presents a potential health risk, activities must be risk assessed, and workers must be informed and trained on the control measures necessary to protect their hearing with suitable supervision in place to ensure controls are adhered to.

## Health Surveillance

Health surveillance in relation to hearing damage should include

- ⌘ regular hearing checks in controlled conditions;
- ⌘ telling employees about the results of their hearing checks;
- ⌘ keeping health records;
- ⌘ ensuring employees are examined by a doctor where hearing damage is identified.

**Health surveillance, including hearing checks, must be provided for all employees who are likely to be regularly exposed to noise levels above the upper exposure action values, or who may be at increased risk — for example, those with existing hearing loss or heightened sensitivity to noise-related damage**

The purpose of health surveillance is to:

- ⌘ warn you when employees might be suffering from early signs of hearing damage;
- ⌘ give you an opportunity to do something to prevent the damage getting worse;
- ⌘ check that control measures are working. Consult your trade union safety representative, or employee representative and the employees concerned before introducing health surveillance. It is important that your employees understand that the aim of health surveillance is to protect their hearing.

**Ideally, hearing checks should start before employees are exposed to loud noise — for example, when someone is new to the job or moves to a noisier role — so you have a baseline to compare future results. However, you can start hearing checks at any time for workers already exposed to noise.**

After the first test, regular checks should follow — usually once a year for the first two years, and then every three years. If any hearing problems are found, or if the noise risk is high, checks may need to happen more often.

The hearing tests must be done by someone properly trained, and the whole health surveillance programme should be overseen by a qualified occupational health professional, such as a trained doctor or nurse.

It is the employer's responsibility to make sure health surveillance is done correctly.

**The below should be carried out prior to tasks commencing.**

- ✔ Risk Assessments and Method Statements that consider the noise ratings of equipment
- ✔ Inform workers on the risks of noise and the proper use of hearing protection equipment and other controls.
- ✔ Maintenance programme in place for tools and equipment to ensure they remain in good working order.
- ✔ Limit the duration of use.
- ✔ Provide adequate hearing protection and training in its use.
- ✔ Implement a health surveillance program.
- ✔ Promote the reporting of hearing problems early on to reduce damage.
- ✔ Obtain quieter equipment where possible.
- ✔ Carry out noise assessments and monitoring.
- ✔ Have designated cutting areas where possible.
- ✔ Sign post mandatory hearing zones.

**Occupational noise exposure should never result in hearing damage.**

**Your employer has a duty to protect you and should be working on measures to reduce the risk. You can play a part in helping your employer to protect you.**

**[Noise: Don't lose your hearing INDG363](#)**

**[The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005](#)**

**[Noise induced hearing loss in Great Britain - HSE](#)**