HEALTH & SAFETY

Safety Code of Practice:

Control of Noise

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Executive Summary

A Safety Code of Practice (SCoP) is a university-wide document that supports policies to provide detailed practical information on how to ensure compliance with relevant laws, standards, and regulations, and must be followed by all Faculties and Divisions.

SCOPs are supplemented by associated Guidance documents, which provide additional advice and information on specific topics and are intended to assist in the development of local procedures.

This document is the second in the Safe Management of Hazardous Locations and Hazardous Procedures C400 series of SCoPs and is intended to support managers and teams in drawing up local operational documents.

Health, Safety & Wellbeing, HR Division

Contents

1. Introduction

Noise during work, research and education can cause temporary or permanent hearing loss, and other hearing related conditions such as tinnitus. Temporary hearing loss after exposure to noise is an indication that continued or repeated exposure may result in permanent damage.

This Safety Code of Practice (SCoP) sets out the measures that Faculties and Divisions must implement to protect staff, students, visitors and others from risks arising from noise on University premises or during activities under the University's control. These measures include assessing noise risks, eliminating or reducing harmful noise exposure through organisational and technical controls, providing appropriate information, instruction and training, and ensuring health surveillance where required.

By putting arrangements in place to meet this SCoP, Faculties and Divisions can ensure that they are protecting those who may be affected by noise, whilst meeting their obligations under the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005.

2. Scope

The SCoP applies to all University employees, students, postgraduate researchers, contractors, visitors and others who may be exposed to noise on University controlled premises or during University managed activities. It covers a wide range of settings, including teaching and research spaces, workshops and plant rooms, music and performance activities, Estates and maintenance work, construction projects, events, and the use of machinery, tools and amplified sound.

The SCoP addresses risks from occupational exposure to continuous, intermittent and impulsive noise that may cause hearing damage or other adverse health effects or interfere with safe working. It supports compliance with the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 and related legislation and should be read alongside other relevant University health and safety policies. Noise nuisance and environmental noise issues are excluded unless they overlap with occupational health and safety responsibilities.

This SCoP does not apply to Sussex Estate and Facilities (SEF), who are responsible for identifying, assessing and controlling noise that they create as a result of work that affects their staff and others.

3. Definitions

Action Level – the level of exposure to noise averaged over a working day or week, or the maximum noise to which someone is exposed in a working day. There is a lower exposure action level and an upper exposure action level that must be observed (Table 1).

Acoustic Shock – a sudden, unexpected noise event which is perceived as loud, that may cause an adverse reaction.

Decibel (dB) – the unit of measurement for loudness of sound. The higher the dB, the louder the sound.

Exposure – subjected to noise during work, research or education.

Exposure Limit Value – the level of noise exposure that must not be exceeded.

Noisy – any work, research or education environment or activity that reaches the action level.

Ototoxic substances – substances such as some solvents and medications that can damage the inner ear causing hearing loss and other related health issues. When combined with noise exposure, these substances can cause a synergistic effect, meaning the damage is worse than the sum of both individual risks.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Executive Deans of Faculty and Directors of Professional Services

Executive Deans of Faculty and Directors of Professional Services are responsible for ensuring that there is a safe system of work in place to ensure that:

- All activities and locations under their control that create noise are identified and ensure that noise risks are considered at the design, planning and procurement stages of any planned works.
- Wherever possible, noise is eliminated.
- A noise risk assessment is undertaken where noise cannot be eliminated from an activity or location, with oversight from consultative bodies including Faculty Health and Safety Committees or Campus Operations Safety Group (Divisions).
- Noise risk assessments are undertaken by competent persons and reviewed periodically or following change.
- Resource is available where a noise risk assessment needs to be conducted by a competent external consultant.
- Arrangements are in place for health surveillance of those who may continue to be exposed to noise.
- Information on noise risks, including how noise levels are controlled, is documented and communicated clearly and effectively to those who need to be aware.
- Training and supervision relating to the risk presented by noise and the control measures to follow are communicated with those involved in activities that create noise or are required to work in noisy environments.
- Suitable and effective arrangements are in place for responding to a noise related emergency or incident.
- Noise related incidents and near misses are reported on the University's incident reporting system.
- Investigations are carried out of more significant noise related incidents and near misses, with the aim of identifying remedial or improvement actions that are then implemented, such as the review of existing noise risk assessments.
- They cooperate and coordinate with other parties, where activities and locations that create noise may have joint responsibility, or may impact others from outside the Faculty or Division.
- All equipment and facilities relating to the management of noise are maintained and tested to ensure they remain effective, and records maintained of this.
- Suitable hearing protection is provided and its use enforced where required.

4.2 Line Managers, Supervisors, Technical Managers and Principal Investigators

Line Managers, Supervisors, Technical Managers and Principal Investigators are responsible for ensuring that:

- All activities and locations that they oversee that create noise are identified, inclusive of public events where noise risks may be present, and that noise is eliminated from these wherever possible.
- A noise risk assessment is undertaken where noise cannot be eliminated, with the aim of reducing noise to as low as reasonably practicable, feeding the outcomes from these into the relevant oversight group, and consulting those involved in the activities in this process.
- Consideration is given in the risk assessment process to both hearing damage risk and the risk of noise masking audible alarms or communication channels.
- A specialist is employed to carry out such a noise risk assessment if the competence to do so is not available within the University community.
- Where required, hearing protection zones are identified, clearly signed and managed.
- Those exposed to noise are identified and required to attend periodic health surveillance.
- Training and information about the outcomes and control measures from noise risk assessments is shared with their staff, students and others who may be affected by the noise, either through direct involvement in the activity, or being in the vicinity of it.
- Arrangements are in place to address emergencies relating to noise from the activities and locations they oversee.
- Any noise related incident or near miss is reported on the University's incident reporting system, and that they investigate these.
- Actions from investigations are implemented and communicated, such as the review of existing noise risk assessments.
- Staff and students are monitored periodically to ensure they continue to understand and follow the control measures in place to protect them from noise, such as the use of personal hearing protective equipment.
- Where there may be joint responsibility for a work area or activity, that they cooperate and coordinate with all parties involved.
- Records are kept of all equipment and facility modifications that have been put in place to protect against noise, and that these are inspected and maintained periodically, in line with manufacturer guidance.
- Maintenance records for such equipment are stored.

4.3 Staff, Students, Contractors, Third Parties and Visitors

Staff, students, contractors, third parties and visitors are responsible for:

- Complying with all safety arrangements and procedures in place to protect them from risks arising from noise.

- Cooperating with and following safety instructions, information and training from their Line Manager, Supervisor, Technical Manager, Principal Investigator or other safety personnel.
- Using hearing protection and other noise control measures as instructed, and not misusing, removing or interfering with such measures.
- Attending health surveillance appointments where required and reporting any concerns about hearing or noise exposure when they arise.
- Reporting noise related incidents, near misses or concerns to their Line Manager, Supervisor, Technical Manager, Principal Investigator or other safety personnel, and on the University's incident reporting system.
- Reporting any defects or faults with equipment or facilities used to control noise through their local reporting or escalation channels.

5. Requirements

5.1 Risk Assessments & Approvals

It is imperative that Faculties and Divisions carry out a noise risk assessment and take action to eliminate or reduce noise in the workplace to protect staff and others. Table 1 illustrates what Faculties and Divisions must do depending on individual noise exposures identified through the noise risk assessment.

Table 1: Exposure Action and Limit Values		
Lower Exposure Action Value		**University Responsibility**
Daily or weekly personal noise exposure	80dB	Hearing protection **MUST** be provided **UPON** request.
Peak sound pressure	135dB	
Upper Exposure Action Value		
Daily or weekly personal noise exposure	85dB	Hearing protection **MUST** be provided **AND** worn.
Peak sound pressure	137dB	
Exposure Limit Value		
Daily or weekly personal noise exposure	87dB	These exposure values must **NEVER** be exceeded.
Peak sound pressure	140dB	

Where potentially noisy activities or environments have been identified, Faculties and Divisions must carry out a suitable and sufficient noise risk assessment. The risk assessment must:

- Be carried out by someone who is competent to do so, which may mean procuring the services of an external consultant if the competence does not already exist within the University community.
- Be based on information and advice from competent sources.
- Identify where there may be a risk from noise and who is likely to be affected.
- Contain a reliable estimate of people's noise exposure, and a comparison of this with the Exposure Action Values (EAVs) and Exposure Limit Values (ELVs) (Table 1).
- Identify the measures required to eliminate risks and exposures or reduce them to as low a level as reasonably practicable.
- Identify those staff who need to be provided with personal hearing protection.
- Identify those staff who need to be provided with health surveillance and whether any staff are at particular risk.

Faculties and Divisions must make sure that noise risk assessments consider:

- The level, type and duration of noise exposure.
- Staff or groups of staff whose health is at particular risk.
- If there are any effects from the interaction between noise and the use of ototoxic substances at work, or between noise and vibration.
- Indirect effects resulting from the interaction between noise and audible warning signals.
- Information provided by the manufacturers of work equipment.
- The availability of alternative equipment designed to reduce the emission of noise.
- Extension of exposure to noise at the workplace beyond normal working hours.
- Appropriate information obtained following health surveillance.
- The availability of personal hearing protectors with adequate attenuation characteristics.

As part of the noise risk assessment process, Faculties and Divisions must use the noise calculator from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to estimate noise exposure to individuals, keeping in mind that individuals may be exposed to different levels of noise across their day or week.

Faculties and Divisions must ensure that those affected by the noise risk assessment, and their safety representatives, are consulted through the process, and that the findings of the risk assessment are documented.

The noise risk assessment must be reviewed regularly, and in any of the following circumstances:

- There is any reason to believe that the risk assessment does not reflect the current noise risk.
- It becomes apparent that there are new ways of working or improved noise control techniques that can be applied to the activities or environment being assessed.
- Health surveillance shows that staff hearing is being damaged, suggesting that noise risks are not being properly controlled.

- Control measures that could not be justified (likely on the grounds of cost) when the risk assessment was originally carried out, become reasonably practicable due to changes in technology and cost.

The noise risk assessment needs to be approved. Where competence to carry out the assessment exists within the University community, once complete, the risk assessment must be presented at the Faculty Health and Safety Committee or Campus Operational Safety Group prior to it being signed off by the relevant Executive Dean of Faculty or Director of Professional Services. Anyone who is required to follow the risk assessment must also sign it to confirm that they have read, understood and agree to follow it.

Where a noise risk assessment needs to be carried out by an external consultant, Faculties and Divisions must carry out due diligence checks prior to procuring their services, for example, through receiving references from other organisations who have used them, checking registrations, and initial meetings to confirm their understanding of how a noise risk assessment is conducted.

Where a noise risk assessment is carried out by an external consultant, it must be presented at the relevant Faculty Health and Safety Committee or Campus Operational Safety Group prior to it being accepted by the relevant Executive Dean of Faculty or Director of Professional Services. The assessment must also be shared with anyone who is required to follow it, and Faculties and Divisions must keep a record to demonstrate that those needing to follow the assessment have read, understood and agree to follow it.

5.2 Physical Controls

From the outcomes of the noise risk assessment, and where noise cannot be eliminated, Faculties and Divisions must put measures in place to reduce noise to as low as reasonably practicable. Where noise exposure meets or exceeds the Upper Exposure Action Value, Faculties and Divisions must establish and implement a documented programme of technical and organisational noise control measures, with defined responsibilities, priorities, and timescales, and must review its effectiveness periodically.

Noise control measures must be selected in accordance with the general principles of prevention, prioritising control at source, followed by control along the noise transmission pathway, with personal protective equipment used only as a last resort.

Faculties and Divisions must ensure that the effectiveness of noise control measures is verified, for example through periodic inspection, observation of working practices, or repeat noise assessments where appropriate.

5.2.1 Facilities

Faculties and Divisions must consider physical controls relating to the facilities they have control of noise. Typical facilities controls include the use of sound-insulated rooms or enclosures, acoustic shielding or barriers around noisy equipment, sound-absorbing materials on walls, ceilings and floors, and the physical separation of noisy activities from quiet areas through zoning the layout design. Additional measures may include vibration isolation, acoustic doors and glazing, silencers or mufflers on fixed plant, and ensuring plant rooms and workshops are appropriately located and constructed. Facilities controls must be

considered at the design, refurbishment and procurement stages, regularly maintained to remain effective, and reviewed where activities or noise sources change.

To eliminate noise in the immediate work area, noisy equipment and processes can be relocated to other rooms with limited access. Faculties and Divisions must also consider the need for noise havens, where noisy equipment or processes cannot be relocated, therefore those needing to be present can be protected from sound. Distance is also effective in reducing noise exposure. Faculties and Divisions must consider how their facilities can be designed and laid out so that noisy equipment or processes are carried out as far away from others as possible.

5.2.2 Equipment

Equipment that makes less noise

Noise must be reduced at the source wherever possible. Therefore, where there is a need to use equipment that creates noise, Faculties and Divisions must look to provide equipment with low noise emissions. Information on this can be provided by the equipment manufacturer. Faculties and Divisions must also consider the need for damping, which prevents noise emissions from vibrating machinery panels, or can prevent machinery from vibrating. Replacement of older or poorly performing equipment with models designed to emit lower noise levels must also be considered.

Visual warning signals

Where noisy environments exist that are under the control of Faculties or Divisions, they must consider any safety alarms, such as the building fire alarm system, that may not be heard over process noise. Where this is the case, suitable equipment must be provided that informs people in the area that the fire alarm, or other audible warning sounds have been activated. This may require the provision of beacons that provide a visual aid, such as a flashing light, when an audible safety alarm sounds.

5.3 Management Controls

5.3.1 Maintenance and servicing

Faculties and Divisions must consider putting in place a maintenance and servicing standard operating procedure that requires all noise making equipment to be serviced and maintained in line with manufacturer's guidelines. This therefore ensures that the noise levels created do not increase as equipment ages. The procedure can also include a specified period of time in which noise making equipment needs to be replaced to ensure the latest noise reduction technology is in place. Faculties and Divisions must also consider implementing a low noise emission equipment purchasing policy.

5.3.2 Reducing the duration of exposure

Rotating staff and others under the control of the Faculty or Division so that they are not exposed to noisy environments and activities throughout their day or week. Breaking their day or week up with quieter activities. Where reasonably practicable, noisy activities should be planned and scheduled to take place at times when fewer people may be exposed, or when alternative quieter work can be undertaken by others.

5.3.3 Quiet areas for breaks

Designating quiet areas, such as staff rooms, where people can take a break away from noisy activities and environments.

5.3.4 Hearing protection zones

Where it has not been possible to reduce noise levels any lower, and the Upper Exposure Action Value is still exceeded, hearing protection zones must be setup, which are clearly signed. People working, studying or carrying out research within them must wear personal hearing protection and this must be enforced at all times.

5.3.5 Health Surveillance

Staff who work or carry out teaching or research in noisy environments or involve noisy activities must be subject to regular health surveillance of their hearing to check whether existing noise control measures are effective and to detect harm at an early stage, before permanent damage occurs. Where noise risk assessments indicate a continuing risk to hearing, health surveillance (typically in the form of baseline and periodic hearing checks) provides a means of monitoring the hearing health of those exposed.

Staff who are subject to the following will usually require health surveillance by their line manager making a referral to Occupational Health:

- Regular and frequent daily exposure or peak sound pressure levels at or above an upper Exposure Action Value (EAV). This can also be indicated by weekly personal noise exposures.
- Occasional exposure at or above an upper EAV where you have any reason to be concerned that your preventative measures may not be effective.
- Exposure between the lower and upper EAVs, or exposure only occasionally above the upper EAV, where the member of staff's health may be at particular risk e.g. if they have a pre-existing hearing problem.

Where an issue is identified, it may suggest that controls in place to reduce noise exposure are not working effectively. Faculties and Divisions must therefore review health surveillance outcomes and act accordingly, which may require a review of the noise risk assessment and the control measures that have been implemented, and preventing an individual identified as being at more risk from working in a noisy environment.

5.3.6 Training and supervision

All those who are required to follow the measures put in place to eliminate noise or reduce it to as low as reasonably practicable must be provided with training and instruction in what to do to ensure they follow the arrangements correctly, and how to report any issues with control measures that may render them ineffective. Faculties and Divisions must ensure that these individuals are also monitored to make sure that they continue to follow arrangements correctly.

5.4 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

5.4.1 Personal Hearing Protection

If it is not possible to eliminate or reduce noise levels and exposure to a safe level, Faculties and Divisions must introduce Personal Hearing Protection (PHP) for individuals. This must also be used as an interim measure whilst developing other controls. However, PHP must not be implemented as an alternative to the noise control measures detailed above.

Where a noise risk assessment identifies that staff will be exposed to noise levels between the lower and upper EAVs, Faculties and Divisions must provide PHP upon request from staff.

Where staff are likely to be exposed to noise levels at or above the upper EAV, or a hearing protection zone has been established, Faculties and Divisions must provide suitable PHP and make sure staff use it. Staff are also obligated to use the PHP in these circumstances.

To ensure staff use and wear their hearing protection correctly, they must be provided with training and instruction in how to do this.

Personal hearing protection must be selected to provide adequate attenuation without over-protecting, so far as reasonably practicable, and must not introduce additional safety risks through impaired communication or alarm audibility.

6. Emergency Arrangements

6.1 Emergency Planning & Preparation

Faculties and Divisions should take reasonable steps to identify foreseeable noise related emergency scenarios. This includes situations such as the sudden release of high noise levels from equipment or plant, failure of noise control measures, abnormal operating conditions, or activities where noise may interfere with the audibility of fire alarms, emergency announcements or verbal instructions. Noise risks associated with emergencies must be considered as part of activity specific risk assessments, particularly in higher risk areas such as workshops, plant rooms, performance spaces, laboratories and construction or maintenance activities.

Clear roles and responsibilities must be defined, staff and students informed and trained to recognise and respond to such events, and arrangements put in place to ensure effective communication, reliable maintenance of noise control measures, and access to suitable hearing protection where unplanned exposure is necessary to make an area safe. These arrangements should be fully integrated with wider University emergency procedures and kept under regular review, particularly following incidents, near misses or changes to activities, equipment or facilities.

6.2 Emergency Response & First Aid

Noise-related emergencies can arise from sudden or unexpected high noise levels, failure of noise controls, or situations where noise prevents effective communication or audible alarms. Immediate action is required where individuals report symptoms such as ringing in the ears, hearing loss, pain or dizziness.

The priority in any such event is to rapidly reduce or stop exposure by stopping work where safe, isolating the noise source, or removing people from the affected area. Where access is unexpectedly required to make the situation safe, appropriate hearing protection must be used and the impact of noise on emergency communication considered.

There is no direct first-aid treatment for noise-induced hearing damage, but anyone experiencing symptoms should be removed from further exposure, reassured and monitored. Persistent or severe symptoms must be escalated promptly for medical advice, including referral to Occupational Health or a GP, with findings used to review existing noise control measures.

6.3 Reporting Incidents & Accidents

Faculties and Divisions must ensure that any incidents, accidents, near misses and cases of hearing loss or damage that occur in relation to the control of noise are reported on the University's incident reporting system.

Faculties and Divisions must ensure that when an incident, accident, near miss or ill health occurs, this is followed up with those concerned to make sure they are recovering and if anything can be done to prevent or reduce the likelihood of reoccurrence.

Where the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team may need to carry out an investigation, Faculties and Divisions must support this process.

7. Transport

Where people are required to use work related transport as part of their role, research or education, there is the risk of noise being significant, and it is under the control of the University, this must also be considered as part of the noise risk assessment.

8. Monitoring & Assurance

Faculties and Divisions must implement local arrangements for ensuring that control measures from noise risk assessments are implemented and followed.

The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team will monitor the implementation of this SCoP through inspection, audit and the review of reported incidents.

9. Records & Retention Requirements

Noise risk assessments must be retained for 5 years once they have been superseded by an updated version.

Any formal procedures relating to noise at work, must be retained for 10 years once superseded by an updated version.

Inspection records and audits relating to noise at work must be retained for 10 years following completion of any actions that were identified.

10. Further Information / Guidance

- HS G406 Guidance on the Controlling Noise at Work (to follow)
- HSE Controlling Noise at Work: Guidance on Regulations (L108)
- HSE Noise at Work: A brief guide to controlling the risks (INDG362)
- HSE Noise and hearing protection calculators
- HSE Noise at Work webpage

11. Legislation & Standards

- The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005

12. References

- UoS Noise webpage

13. Appendices

This section is not relevant to the scope of this document.

14. Document Control

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