



University of Sussex
Health, Safety & Wellbeing Office

Control of Noise at Work Policy

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University of Sussex

Noise at Work Policy

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1. Introduction

1.1. Noise may interfere with working efficiency by being an annoyance and causing stress; it may directly cause accidents by hindering communication and most importantly can cause damage to hearing. The risk of damage depends on the dose of sound energy received over a period of time. A temporary loss of hearing lasting from a few seconds to a few days may result from exposure to intense noise for a short time. Regular exposure to high noise levels over a long period is much more serious and may result in the destruction of certain inner ear structures and a loss of hearing which is incurable. Indications that someone is developing hearing loss may include

- an inability to hear high-pitched or soft sounds
- trouble understanding conversation in a crowded room
- ringing or whistling in the ears (tinnitus)

1.2. Hearing loss, of course, is not always caused by exposure to noise at work; it is part of the normal ageing process and can also be caused by disease. However, employers must consider the noise to which their employees are exposed during their work and must ensure that measures are taken, if necessary, to reduce the risk.

1.3. It is the policy of the University to put in place measures to protect employees and others who may be exposed, from the risks of noise-induced hearing loss and to comply with the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005, the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999 and the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.

2. Scope

2.1. This policy applies to all University employees and any person who may be affected by the work activity conducted by the University. This includes students, visitors, contractors and the general public.

2.2. This document applies to the control of noise levels in the workplace to prevent damage to the hearing from noise exposure, by considering the Exposure Action Values and Exposure Limit Values where long term exposure will cause noise induced hearing loss.

3. Definitions

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

3.2. **Exposure** – exposure whilst at work

3.3. **Action Levels** – the levels of exposure to noise averaged out over a

working day or week or the maximum noise to which an employee is exposed in a working day.

- 3.4. **Maximum Exposure Values** – the levels of noise exposure that must not be exceeded
- 3.5. **Control Measure** – any measure to reduce the risk in the workplace, eg. Standard Operating Procedures, mechanical devices, personal protective equipment, training, restricted access zones
- 3.6. **Acoustic Shock** – a sudden, unexpected noise event which is perceived as loud, transmitted through a telephone or headset that may cause an adverse reaction
- 3.7. **Noisy Work Environment** – any working environment that reaches the action levels in 5. Details of Procedure, described below

4. Responsibilities

4.1. The University will:

- 4.1.1 Ensure that employees and workers (staff at work and students attending lecture and practical sessions) are not exposed to persistent or instantaneous noise of a kind that would be detrimental to hearing.
- 4.1.2 Keep up with good practice and relevant higher education sector and industry standards for noise control.
- 4.1.3 Encourage continuous improvements

4.2. Heads of Schools and Directors must:

- 4.2.1 Ensure that noise is taken into account in risk assessments and reviews for relevant activities. Formal assessment of the risk to health is required where noise levels exceed the lower exposure action value.
- 4.2.2 Reduce noise exposure levels so far as is reasonably practicable, by reducing the production of noise or by reducing people's exposure to it, or a mixture of the two.
- 4.2.3 Consider alternative processes, equipment and/or working methods which will make the work quieter or mean people are exposed for shorter times.
- 4.2.4 Consider noise levels when purchasing new equipment, and where possible specify and purchase quieter equipment.
- 4.2.5 Consider noise levels when installing or relocating equipment or activities, and where possible make adjustments to minimise noise production.

4.2.6 Have maintenance arrangements that ensure equipment continues to operate properly and does not become noisier over time.

4.2.7 Request a noise survey if there are concerns about noise levels in between scheduled two-yearly surveys.

4.2.8 Provide suitable hearing protection to workers (staff and students), on request, where the personal noise exposure is between the lower and upper exposure action values.

4.2.9 Designate and provide signage for hearing protection zones, where necessary, where exposure to workers (staff and students) is equal to or exceeds the upper exposure action value.

4.2.10 Keep a record of all workers (staff and students) exposed to noise levels exceeding the upper exposure action value.

4.2.11 Inform workers (staff and students) where the personal noise exposure is above the upper exposure action value and provide relevant information.

4.2.12 Provide suitable hearing protection to workers (staff and students) in designated hearing protection zones, and require and supervise its wearing.

4.2.13 Where hearing protection is provided (on request or mandatory), provide suitable training and instruction on correct fitting, maintenance and suitable storage.

4.2.14 Where hearing protection is mandatory, provide suitable supervision to ensure rules are followed and hearing protection is being used properly. Where necessary, the University's disciplinary procedures should be followed.

4.2.15 Refer employees to the Occupational Health Service for health surveillance (hearing checks) if they are likely to be regularly exposed above the upper exposure action values, or are at risk for any reason e.g. they already suffer from hearing loss or are particularly sensitive to damage.

4.3. The Health, Safety & Wellbeing Office will:

4.3.1 Carry out or arrange a noise survey of all relevant areas every two years, or sooner if problems are reported; keep records of all noise surveys undertaken.

4.3.2 Provide survey findings to the relevant Head of the School/Director??? and provide advice on any necessary remedial actions.

4.4. Occupational Health Service will:

4.4.1 Arrange for appropriate health surveillance (hearing checks) of relevant employees.

4.5. Staff must:

4.5.1 Use hearing protection provided for mandatory use in designated hearing protection zones.

4.5.2 Attend health surveillance (hearing checks) if requested to do so by the Occupational Health Service.

4.6. Students are required to:

4.6.1 Use hearing protection provided for mandatory use in designated hearing protection zones.

5. Details of procedure/operational details

Action Levels

5.1. The Control of Noise at Work Regulations require the University to take specific action at certain levels of noise exposure. These relate to the levels of exposure averaged over a working day or week and the maximum noise (peak sound pressure) which staff are exposed to in a working day.

Lower Exposure Action Values

5.2. The Lower Exposure Action Value is reached where a member of staff is exposed to an average daily or weekly noise dose of 80 dB or a peak sound pressure of 135 dB. If these levels are reached, staff members must be;

- informed of the level of exposure
- the associated risks,
- instructed in how to minimise the risks and be provided with ear protection.

Upper Exposure Action Values

5.3. The Upper Exposure Action Value is reached where a member of staff is exposed to an average daily or weekly noise dose of 85 dB or a peak sound pressure of 137 dB.

If these levels are reached,

- ear protection must be provided to ensure that the daily noise dose is reduced to below 85 dB,
- the area must be designated an ear protection zone and staff exposed
- provided with annual health surveillance.

5.4. Exposure Limit Values

The Regulations also set maximum levels of noise exposure of 87 dB and the peak sound pressure is 140 dB that must not be exceeded. . These exposure limit values take into account any reduction in exposure provided by hearing protection.

5.5. Identifying if there is a noise problem in the workplace

Identifying whether there is a noise problem in the workplace will depend on how loud the noise is and how long people are exposed to it. As a simple guide, action should be taken if any of the following apply:

- Is the noise intrusive, e.g.machinery noise, continuous process noise, vehicle noise for most of the working day?
- Do staff working in the area have to raise their voices to carry out a normal conversation when about 2 metres apart for at least part of the day?
- Do staff use noisy power tools or machinery for more than half an hour each day?
- Are there noises due to impacts such as hammering, pneumatic impact tools etc?
- Are there areas of the workplace where noise levels could interfere with warning or danger signals?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'yes' then a risk assessment should be undertaken. Please see the guidance document titled **Noise Control Risk Assessment** for further information.

If noise levels exceed either exposure action values, hearing protection is only acceptable where technical and organisational measures have not reduced the noise exposure below the action levels in the Regulations or as a short-term measure while other methods of controlling noise are being developed.

6. Training

6.1. All staff should be aware of the risks they may be exposed to and the findings of the risk assessment and any noise monitoring should be shared. If the lower action value is reached, staff should be informed of:

- the likely noise exposure and the risk to their hearing this creates
- what control measures are in place
- where to obtain hearing protection and how to report defects in this equipment
- what they should do to minimise risk including wearing PPE and safety working practices
- the University's health surveillance process
- how to detect the first signs of hearing damage

6.2. All staff that are required to use hearing protection must be trained in the correct use of it, how to look for defects and where to obtain hearing protection.

7. Health Surveillance

7.1. Health surveillance (hearing checks) will be provided by the University's Occupational Health Service for all staff who are likely to be regularly exposed above the upper action values (determined by noise monitoring and risk assessment), or are at risk for any reason, e.g. have a preexisting hearing condition.

- 7.2. The purpose of health surveillance is to provide advance warning of any early signs of hearing damage so that control measures can be implemented and the situation monitored.
- 7.3. Health surveillance will also be carried out for new starters or those changing jobs before staff are exposed to noise, where the job has been identified as one requiring health surveillance. This is to provide a baseline assessment. Health Surveillance can be introduced at any time for staff even if staff have already been exposed to high noise levels or if dictated by risk assessment. This would be followed by routine and planned checks (usually annually).

8. Monitoring & review

- 8.1. The implementation and effectiveness of this policy will be monitored by the University's Health, Safety & Environment Committee. This will be done through a number of indicators:
- incident and accident statistics
 - RIDDOR incidents reported to the HSE
 - legal action / claims data
 - sickness absence data
 - Occupational Health data on health surveillance
- 8.2. Heads of Schools and Directors will monitor risk assessments and control measures through their Health & Safety Committees. Any problems highlighted should be brought to the attention of the University's Health, Safety and Wellbeing Office who will then inform the Health, Safety & Environment Committee.

9. References/Related Documents

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
Controlling Noise at Work – Guidance on the Regulations (L108 HSE)
Noise at Work – Guidance For employers on the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 (INDG362(rev1) HSE)