

Toolbox Talk



Noise

Noise at work can cause hearing damage that is permanent and disabling. Hearing loss can be gradual because of exposure to noise over time, but also damage caused by sudden, extremely loud noises. The damage can stop people being able to understand speech, keep up with conversations or use the telephone. People may develop tinnitus, a distressing condition which can lead to disturbed sleep. Noise at work can interfere with communications and make warnings harder to hear. It can also reduce people's awareness of their surroundings. These issues can put people at risk of injury or death.

When is noise a problem?

- The noise is intrusive; for example as noisy as a busy road for most of the day.
- People have to raise their voices to carry out a conversation when 2m apart.
- People using noisy powered tools.
- You carry out noisy tasks; such as construction, demolition.
- There are noises due to impacts; such as hammering and piling.

What action is needed?

If there is a noise problem you should carry out a risk assessment to decide what action is needed and develop a plan. And record the findings.

The risk assessment is more than taking a measurement of noise. The risk assessment should;

- Identify where there may be a risk and who is affected.
- Contain an estimate of the noise exposure.
- Identify the action; noise control measures and / or personal hearing protection.
- Identify who needs to be provided with health surveillance.

Noise Exposure levels:

Daily personal noise exposure LEP,d represents a daily noise dose, a combination of how loud and how long exposed for the various noises that a person is exposed to in a working day.

Likely peak sound pressure levels LCpeak also need to be determined.

An estimate can be made using HSE industry specific guidance.

	Lower exposure action	Upper exposure action value
Daily personal noise exposure (LEP,d)	80	85
Peak sound pressure (LCpeak)	135	137

Take action; Control the risks:

Where people are exposed at or above the upper exposure action value, action must be taken to reduce noise exposure with a planned programme of noise control, such as using quieter equipment, using screens or barriers, creating quiet work areas and limiting the time people are exposed.

Even where noise exposures are below the upper exposure action values, action should be taken to reduce the risks, eg by reducing the exposure further.

Personal hearing protection should be used where extra protection is needed above what has been achieved using noise control and as a short-term measure. It must be suitable and training in its use must be given to ensure it is used properly.