

Risk *topics*

Noise at Work Regulations 1992

Introduction

These Regulations apply to all workers and work activities. Employers must carry out assessments of the noise exposure levels within their premises, take appropriate preventive action at defined action levels and must reduce the risk of employees' hearing being damaged by noise to the lowest reasonably practicable level.

Action levels

The "first action level" establishes a daily personal noise exposure of 85dB(A), if you cannot hear clearly what someone is saying when you are 2 metres away, noise is most likely to be above this level.

The "second action level" establishes a daily personal noise exposure of 90dB(A), if you cannot hear someone clearly when you are about 1 metre away, noise is most likely to be above this level.

The third level is a "peak action level" of 200 pascals (equivalent to 140dB). This is most likely to be important where workers are subject to loud impulses in the working day.

Exposure assessments

Employers must make arrangements for an adequate assessment, by a "competent person", of exposure to noise, where this is likely to be at or above either the first

or peak action levels. Adequate records must be kept of assessments and reviews routinely undertaken or when significant changes in the work occur.

Risk reduction

Where possible noise should be reduced or controlled at source, for example by fitting silencers to all exhausts, better maintenance, slower running speeds, isolating noisy machines and processes in separate rooms. Reducing the time to which personnel are exposed to noise only has a limited effect on exposure levels.

Should it prove impossible or impracticable to reduce noise levels to within safe limits, then it is necessary to supply exposed workers with a personal ear protection to deal with the noise. This hearing protective equipment constitutes the last line of defence.

Employers are required to designate any part of the premises where employees are likely to be exposed to the second action level or above, or to the peak action level or above, as an "ear protection zone". This should be identified with signs indicating ear protectors must be worn.

The employer should ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, that anything provided by him for the purposes of the Regulations is properly used and maintained in efficient working order.

This is one of a series of 38 Risk Topics produced from within the UK.

Risk Engineering

Where standard solutions are the exception

Every employer must provide employees with adequate information, instruction and training on the risk of hearing damage which exposure to noise may cause and actions to minimise that risk. Employees should be encouraged to have regular hearing tests where they are exposed to significant levels of noise at work.

Employees

Employees should make full and proper use of noise control measures and ear protectors, which the employer is required to provide, and report any defective equipment.

Available from HSE books (Tel : 01787 881165)

L108 Reducing noise at work : Guidance on the Noise at Work Regulations 1989

IND(G) 75 Introducing the Noise at Work Regulations : a brief guide to the requirements for controlling noise at work

IND(G) 183 Health surveillance in noisy industries : advice for employers

IND(G) 99 Noise at work : advice for employees

The Risk Topics provide specialist guidance in the areas of property protection and health & safety

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