

Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 applies and requires all employers to assess and manage the risks associated with exposure to noise.

The health effects of noise at work

Noise at work can cause hearing loss that can be temporary or permanent. People often experience temporary deafness after leaving a noisy place. Although hearing recovers within a few hours, this should not be ignored. It is a sign that if you continue to be exposed to the noise your hearing could be permanently damaged. Permanent hearing damage can be caused immediately by sudden, extremely loud, explosive noises (eg cartridge operated machines).

Hearing loss is usually gradual because of prolonged exposure to noise. It may only be when damage caused by noise over the years combines with hearing loss due to ageing that people realise how deaf they have become. This may mean their family complains about the television being too loud, they cannot keep up with conversations in a group or they have trouble using the telephone. Eventually everything becomes muffled and people find it difficult to catch sounds eg 't', 'd' and 's' so they confuse similar words. Hearing loss is not the only problem. People may develop tinnitus (ringing, whistling, buzzing or humming in the ears), a distressing condition which can lead to disturbed sleep.

Planning procedure

The aim of these regulations is to ensure that workers' hearing is protected from excessive noise at their place of work which could cause them to lose their hearing and/or to suffer from tinnitus (permanent ringing in the ears). The level at which employers must provide hearing protection and hearing protection zones is 85 decibels (daily or weekly average exposure) and the level at which employers must assess the risk to workers' health and provide them with information and training is now 80 decibels. There is also an exposure limit value of 87 decibels, taking account of any

reduction in exposure provided by hearing protection, above which workers must not be exposed.

What employers must do

By law, as an employer, you must assess and identify measures to eliminate or reduce risks from exposure to noise so that you can protect the hearing of your employees. Where the risks are low, the actions you take may be simple and inexpensive, but where the risks are high, you should manage them using a prioritised noise-control action plan. Where required, ensure that:

- Hearing protection is provided and used
- Any other controls are properly used
- You provide information, training and health surveillance
- Review what you are doing if anything changes that may affect the noise exposures where you work

References

Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 (HSE)

Acknowledgement: This information has been reviewed and updated by Jim Slater (CDM-C and Health & Safety Advisor)
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