

Noise at Work

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Introduction

The information on this page is mainly aimed at workers.

- Noise is part of everyday life, but loud noise can permanently damage your hearing.
- Young or old, once you lose your hearing you can never get it back.
- New regulations have been introduced to better protect workers from noise at work from April 2006.

Am I at risk?

You are at risk if you can answer 'yes' to any of these questions about the noise where you work:

- Is the noise intrusive - like a busy street, a vacuum cleaner or a crowded restaurant - for most of the working day?
- Do you have to raise your voice to have a normal conversation when about 2 m apart for at least part of the day?
- Do you use noisy powered tools or machinery for over half an hour a day?
- Do you work in a noisy industry, e.g. construction, demolition or road repair; woodworking; plastics processing; engineering; textile manufacture; general fabrication; forging, pressing or stamping; paper or board making; canning or bottling; foundries?
- Are there noises because of impacts (e.g. hammering, drop forging, pneumatic impact tools etc), explosive sources such as Cartridge - operated tools or detonators, or guns?
- Do you have muffled hearing at the end of the day, even if it is better by the next morning?

Symptoms and early signs of hearing loss

- Conversation becomes difficult or impossible
- Your family complains about the television being too loud
- You have trouble using the telephone
- You find it difficult to catch sounds like 't', 'd' and 's', so you confuse similar words
- Permanent tinnitus (ringing, whistling, buzzing or humming in the ears) can also be caused

Generally hearing loss is gradual. By the time you notice it, it is probably too late. We want to prevent hearing loss before it happens. You can also suffer instant damage from very loud or explosive noises.

People's own stories

Dye house

A dyer who worked in a dye house for 15 years had a hearing check and was found to have 50% hearing loss at the age of 37. He now has problems using the phone, and needs an amplifier. Traffic is hard to hear unless he is right next to it, so crossing a road becomes stressful. When driving he often stays in 3rd gear too long as he can't hear the engine revving. Hearing loss could have been prevented with hearing protection.

Textile

A woman working in the textiles industry, only realised something needed to be done about her hearing loss when at the age of 40 she could not hear the phone ringing any more. Such hearing loss could have been prevented in the short-term with hearing protection. In the longer term, other ways of reducing exposure included quieter machines, maintenance, and changing job patterns.

Orchestra

A trombone player suffered dulling of his hearing after 20 years of playing. These problems may have been avoided if the orchestras he played in had tried different layouts or used risers that allowed him to play over the heads of those in front - rather than use them as human sound absorbers! He could also have tried to get used to wearing flat response earplugs so that he could still hear all frequencies.

DJ

A 24-year-old DJ found that, after working in a club where the sound system was particularly loud, he went home with a ringing sensation and it took several days for his ears to recover. The ringing in one ear has never completely stopped and he has become sensitive to loud music. He is now careful to wear suitable earplugs when DJ-ing.

Want to help?

Please contact the Noise and Vibration Programme Unit via our <http://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/feedback.htm> page if you wish to tell us your story, so that a short summary can appear here for the benefit of others. We are particularly interested in stories that turn out well in the end, e.g. hearing problems picked up at an early stage and simple steps taken to prevent further damage for similar workers.

Discover what it sounds like to have noise-induced hearing loss www.hse.gov.uk/noise/demonstration.htm

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/noise/noisemeter_html/hp0.html

Play around with the Noise Meter and hear the different sounds and sound intensities of everyday objects

Tasks and industries

Jobs and industries most likely to involve noise include:

- Construction
- Demolition or road repair
- Woodworking
- Plastics processing
- Engineering
- Textile manufacture
- General fabrication
- Forging, pressing or stamping
- Paper or board making

- Canning or bottling
- Foundries

Tools

Tools and equipment that can cause hearing loss include:

- Hammering
- Drop forging
- Pneumatic impact tools etc
- Drills
- Chainsaws
- Explosive sources such as cartridge-operated tools or detonators, or guns

Many of these hand-held tools also transmit vibration into your hands and arms.

How do I protect myself?

Co-operate.

Help your employer to do what is needed to protect your hearing. Make sure you use properly any noise control devices (e.g. noise enclosures), and follow any working methods that are put in place. Also attend hearing checks. This means you need to take some responsibility for your hearing.

Wear any hearing protection you are given.

Wear it properly (you should be trained how to do this), and make sure you wear it all the time when you are doing noisy work, and when you are in hearing protection areas. Taking it off even for a short while means that your hearing could still be damaged. Remember that there is no cure for deafness.

Look after your hearing protection.

Your employer should tell you how to look after it and where you can get it from. Make sure you understand what you need to do.

Report any problems

With your hearing protection or noise control devices straight away. Let your employer or safety representative know. If you have any ear trouble, let your employer know.

Where can I find out more?

For more information on noise:

HSE's free pocket card **Noise: Don't lose your hearing** <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg363.htm> INDG363 (Contains notes on good practice which you may find helpful).

Download HSE's free leaflet **Noise at work: A brief guide to controlling the risks** <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg362.htm> INDG362 (rev1) (This leaflet is for employers on good practice and considering what they need to do).

- **You can also order a copy of these publications through HSE Books** <http://books.hse.gov.uk/hse/public/home.jsf>
- **Free leaflets** <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/noisindx.htm>
- **Further information** <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/noisindx.htm>

Who can help?

Your employer has a duty to protect you and should be working on measures to reduce the risk. The law says that your employer has to find out what levels of noise you are exposed to and assess the risk to your hearing. See [Advice for employers](#)

Safety Representative/Employee representative. Trade-union-appointed safety reps or other employee representatives can be very useful in communicating problems, inspecting documents and consulting employers over measures to meet these regulations.

Your company doctor or your GP. This may be an occupational health professional where you have a company occupational health scheme or your general practitioner through the NHS.