

PROTECT YOUR HEARING

WHY BOTHER ABOUT NOISE?

Sounds and noises are an important part of everyday life. In moderation they are harmless, but if they are too loud they can permanently damage your hearing. The danger depends on how loud the noise is and how long you are exposed to it.

The damage builds up gradually and you may not notice changes from one day to another, but once the damage is done there is no cure. The effects may include:

- ❑ Sounds and speech may become muffled so that it is hard to tell similar sounding words apart, or to pick out a voice in a crowd;
- ❑ Permanent ringing in the ears (called tinnitus);
- ❑ A distorted sense of loudness. Sufferers may ask people to speak up, then complain that they are shouting; and
- ❑ Needing to turn up the television too loud, or finding it hard to use the telephone.

You should not have to suffer damage of this sort because of noise at work. It can be prevented by reducing noise levels, for example by fitting enclosures and silencers to machines and using ear plugs or ear muffs properly if you have to work in noisy areas.

WHAT THE LAW REQUIRES

The Noise at Work Regulations say what you and your employer must do. But the danger is only likely to be controlled effectively if you and your employer co-operate to make sure noise levels are assessed and that control measures work properly.

WHAT EMPLOYERS HAVE TO DO ABOUT NOISE

Your employer must have the noise assessed wherever your exposure might reach one of the “Action Levels” of the Noise at Work Regulations. If you have to shout or raise your voice to be heard by someone two metres away or if your ears are ringing when you finish work, you should find out if this has been done.

If your exposure reaches the “Action Levels”, your employer should take a number of steps including:

- ❑ Tell you where noise levels are high and warn you about the risk to your hearing;
- ❑ Control noise;
- ❑ Provide you with ear protection – ear muffs or ear plugs – suitable for your job;
- ❑ Mark any “Ear Protection Zones” and
- ❑ Provide adequate information and training on how to use noise control equipment, where and when to use ear protectors, how to look after them and what to do if you find anything wrong with the equipment.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

- ❑ Use the noise control equipment provided. If you work at a machine, which is meant to have silencers or enclosures, making sure they are always in place and working properly.
- ❑ Use ear protectors all the time you are exposed to loud noise. Wherever there is a serious risk of hearing damage your employer **must** provide you with ear protectors and you must wear them. This will include all marked “Ear Protection Zones”. In areas where the risk is not so high, your employer has to offer you ear protectors. It is in your interest to use them.
- ❑ Look after your ear protectors, learn how to use them properly and keep them clean. Damaged, dirty protectors won’t work properly and could cause an ear infection.
- ❑ Don’t ignore faulty equipment. If you find something wrong with your ear protectors or the noise control equipment, or you have problems with them, tell someone who can get them put right.
- ❑ Don’t neglect your hearing. If you think there is something wrong with your hearing see your own doctor or works medical department if you have one. Remember to tell them you work in a noisy area

