

## **The Noise of Change or the Change of Noise!**

### **The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005**

After a significant amount of initial publicity and media attention some years ago, a review of the Control of Noise at Work Regulations has been completed and the new regulations are due to come into force on the 1st April 2006. Surprisingly all has been very quiet in recent months! We felt that it was important however, for you to review your organisations provision with regards to the Control of Noise at Work Regulations, which will now impact on some organisations who previously were exempt due to the fact that the noise levels have been ratcheted downwards.

The initial Control of Noise at Work Regulations came into force in 1986. These regulations did no more than to standardise a level of worker protection that had been in place in the UK since the 1960's.

The rate of change has been considerable over the last 20 years, both in terms of our ability to control noise and also the expectation of employees to work in quieter environments.

The general principle of the new Control of Noise at Work Regulations is that the levels of exposure that trigger employer action have been reduced by 5 dBA. The new requirements for employers are:

- **The first action level is now 80dBA.** At this level the employee's exposure to noise should be assessed and hearing protection made available.
- **The second action level is now at 85 dBA.** At this level an Audiometric Health Surveillance Programme should be introduced, hearing protection is mandatory and employees should be given information, instruction and training about the noise issues within their workplace the control measures in place and hearing protection and safe working practices that are available.
- **The assessment period for noise exposure has changed** from an eight-hour time weighted average, to a daily exposure of eight hours or exposure over one week.
- **Peak Sound Pressure exposure levels are now a lower action level of 135 dB and an upper exposure peak action level of 137 dB.**
- **The new Noise at Work Regulations 2005 also set levels of noise exposure, which should not be exceeded.** These are a daily or weekly exposure of 87 dB and a peak sound pressure of 140 dB.

## **Do I have a noise problem at work?**

The answer to this question will depend on how loud the noise is within your workplace and for how long employees are exposed to this noise. As a general rule you will have to make a more detailed assessment with regards to noise within your working environment if any of the following apply to your organisation:

- Is the noise intrusive? This could be caused by street or traffic noise, a vacuum cleaner, a crowded workplace or a public area.
- Do you have to raise your voice to carry out a normal conversation when you are 2 metres apart from another colleague for at least part of your working day?
- Are noisy power tools or machinery used for more than half an hour each day in your workplace?
- Do you work in a noisy industry? For example, construction or demolition. Road repair, wood working, plastics industry, engineering, textile manufacturing, forging, pressing, stamping, the paper or board industry, the canning or bottling industry.
- Do you experience high impact noise? This could be hammering, forging or the use of pneumatic impact tools.

If any of the above apply to your particular operation, you will need to make a detailed risk assessment. This must be drawn up by somebody who is competent to carry out the task and it should be based on measurements from organisations or individuals who are competent to make such environmental measurements.

With the introduction of the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 in April 2006, this is a good opportunity to review the provision of the control measures that you have within your organisation and the potential for health surveillance. For any further advice with regards to these issues, please do not hesitate to contact us at Preventative Healthcare. For some organisations it may be the first time that you now have to consider noise as a major hazard due to the fact that the Control of Noise at Work Regulations have brought down the environment levels. To introduce a Noise at Work Policy and a Health Surveillance Programme you will require competent advice and support. Preventative Healthcare is able to give you such a service. For further details please contact Jane Puncher on 01622 775285.

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