

1. OBJECTIVE

Guidance on Occupational Noise

2. PROCEDURE

2.1. Noise Hazards

A noise hazard exists where a person is exposed to workplace noise levels:

- Exceeding an average of 85 decibels (dB (A)) over an eight-hour period and/or
- Peaking at more than 140 dB(C).

2.2. Minimum Requirements relating to Noise

2.2.1. Preliminary Noise Assessment

As a minimum in our work and learning environment, where there is potential for a noise hazard, the Operational Leader, in consultation with a sample of staff from the area being looked at, shall undertake a preliminary assessment using HSW-PR35-CL01 Noise Hazard Identification Checklist. This will identify work areas where the level of noise to which a person may be exposed is likely to exceed an average of 85 decibels (dB (A)) over an 8 hour period or peak at more than 140 decibels (dB(C)) (noise exposure standards).

No special skills are needed to conduct a preliminary noise survey / assessment provided there is appropriate consultation with the staff familiar with the work activities and associated noise within that area.

The preliminary noise assessment must be undertaken by walking through the workplace and identifying noisy processes or tasks and gathering information from any equipment manufacturers (such as sound power or sound pressure levels).

When conducting a noise assessment, divide the workplace into separate areas and consider exposure to persons who do not work in fixed locations (such as maintenance personnel, cleaners, and contractors) and noise from portable equipment (such as hand-held tools) that may impact from time to time upon noise exposure.

Reference decibel levels of common sounds as a guide when making a preliminary assessment as to whether a person is exposed to noise likely to exceed the noise exposure standard– i.e. 85 decibels (dB (A)) is noise just above that made by a heavy vehicle and 140 decibels (dB (C)) is noise just above that made by a jet plane taking off.

2.2.2. Noise Exposure Survey

Where a preliminary assessment suggests the level of noise to which a person may be exposed is 'likely' to exceed the noise exposure standard, the Operational Leader must engage a competent person to undertake a noise exposure survey, in consultation with the Senior Advisor, Health and Safety, so as to:

- Definitively determine / verify whether or not a person is exposed to noise exceeding the exposure standard
- Accurately measure the noise to which persons are exposed to assess the risk of hearing loss in LAeq,8h and peak levels
- Identify the sources of noise and verify the effectiveness of existing control measures
- Suggest methods of eliminating or controlling noise where existing controls are inadequate

A 'competent person' is a person possessing adequate qualifications, including suitable training and sufficient knowledge, experience and skill, for performance of a noise survey / assessment (such as an acoustic engineer or occupational hygienist).

2.2.3. *Eliminate/control the risk*

Where determined by the competent person that a person is exposed to noise exceeding the exposure standard, the Operational Leader in consultation with sample of staff from the area (and the competent person if necessary), must identify strategies or measures to eliminate or control noise.

Depending on the nature and extent of the workplace noise, associated level of risk and issues of practicability, priority must be given to eliminating or controlling risks arising from workplace noise in accordance with following hierarchy (and applying combined responses where necessary and practicable):

- Eliminating the noise at its source by replacing noisy equipment with less noisy equipment
- Engineering out the noise at its source (and developing procedures for purchasing quieter plant and equipment in the future)
- Otherwise engineering out the noise by modifying the work environment or work activities (and developing procedures for purchasing quieter plant and equipment in the future) including:
 - i. Dampening of panels (e.g. increasing stiffness or using rubber / plastic bumpers / cushions)
 - ii. Isolating vibrating machinery to prevent structure-borne noise (e.g. reducing sound transmission through solids or installing flexible mountings)
 - iii. Fitting silencers or mufflers and/or
 - iv. Altering work practices (e.g. drop heights)
- Developing and implementing safe work procedures or practices such as job rotation and modified work schedules to reduce the time or extent of exposure to noise
- Purchasing and providing personal hearing protection to exposed persons having regard to issues including reliability, adequacy (ensuring hearing protection does not 'overprotect' - protect to the point persons cannot hear alarms, instructions or feel isolated) and comfort (to facilitate use by persons)
- Developing and implementing safe work procedures for the selection and use of personal hearing protection incorporating the following:
 - v. Documentation establishing why hearing protection selected was considered most suitable
 - vi. Provision of information, instruction and training to ensure personnel are familiar with hearing protection (including selection, fitting, use, care and maintenance)
 - vii. Provision of a suitable range of hearing protection to people for their exclusive use
 - viii. Recording the types of hearing protection issued to which persons
 - ix. Provision of adequate supplies of protectors at accessible locations
 - x. Provision for regular inspection and cleaning of hearing protection
 - xi. Provision of education and programs designed to promote correct wearing and maintain a positive attitude towards hearing preservation and use of hearing protection
 - xii. Provision of ongoing auditory assessment if appropriate (see HSW-PR18 Health Surveillance).