

Managing risks - Noise

A noise risk assessment should be carried out when workers and others may be exposed to excessive noise levels.

To assess noise levels a sound level meter (SLM) or noise dose meter (NDM) should be used. These meters are designed to measure a frequency-weighted and time-weighted value of the sound pressure level.

Aims

The aims of noise risk assessments are to:

- identify whether the noise under investigation is excessive or not;
- establish the noise characteristics and the daily duration of exposure;
- identify all persons likely to be exposed to excessive noise;
- identify all items of plant and equipment likely to cause excessive noise;
- obtain information on work practices and associated noise sources;
- identify what higher order controls can be put in place to reduce noise level exposure;
- check the effectiveness of measures taken to reduce noise level exposure;
- choose appropriate personal hearing protectors for those workers and other persons exposed to risks from excessive noise; and,
- define designated hearing protection areas at work.

Noise assessments should be repeated at least every five years or whenever there is a change of plant, work processes, building structure or duration of work arrangements.

Noise assessment records should be kept at the workplace and made available for inspection by workers.

More information

More detailed information on noise measurement and recording is available in part 1 of AS/NZS 1269: Occupational noise management.

Noise control policy

An important step in managing noise in the workplace is the development of a noise control policy, which should cover:

- goals for noise exposure and peak noise levels;
- design goals for new workplaces and plant;
- selection and purchase of quiet plant;
- noise controls for temporary work areas and situations;
- agreements with contractors for the responsibility of noise control and provision of information;
- audiometric testing and availability of records; and,
- implementing a hearing conservation program.

Hearing conservation program

A hearing conservation program sets out the ways the noise policy will be achieved. Elements of commitment to a hearing conservation program are as follows:

- nominating a person to be responsible for overseeing the program;
- carrying out preliminary noise checks to assess if problems with noise exposure exists;
- developing a program to choose new or replacement plant to reduce noise exposure;
- choosing suitable noise control measures;
- choosing, providing and maintaining personal hearing protectors;
- identifying hearing protection areas;

- giving induction and ongoing refresher training to workers;
- providing audiometric testing at the beginning of employment to establish base level hearing and during employment to determine any hearing loss;
- maintaining records in an easily understood form and available for inspection by certain persons;
- check that noise control measures are maintained and operating effectively; and,
- check noise levels to ensure that hidden defects in machinery which could cause excessive noise levels are identified.

Information and training for workers

Information and training for workers should include the following points:

What noise is and how to assess it.

Possible health effects due to noise.

Social effects on the person's life, and that of family and friends, of noise induced hearing loss and tinnitus.

Noise control policy and hearing conservation program.

The noise exposures in the particular workplace and the control measures used to protect workers.

Legal responsibilities for controlling excessive noise in the workplace.

Control measures used in the workplace for the protection of exposed workers.

Specific control measures necessary for each of the exposed worker positions and the correct use, operation and maintenance of noise control equipment.

Correct use of personal hearing protectors.

Arrangements for reporting defects likely to cause excessive noise.

This training should also be provided to all staff responsible for purchasing of plant, noise control equipment and personal hearing protectors.