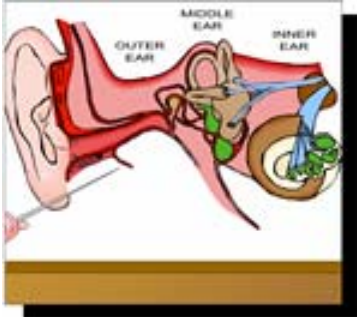


Ear to the Ground

The new noise regulations formally known as “S.I. No. 371 of 2006 Safety, Health & Welfare at Work (Control of Noise at Work) Regulations 2006” came into force last July. These Regulations revoke and replace the European Communities (Protection of Workers) (Exposure to Noise) Regulations 1990.



The Regulations are aimed at protecting workers from the risks to their hearing caused by noise and at preventing hearing loss and deafness. They introduce an ‘exposure limit value’ which must not be breached and reduce the noise levels at which action must be taken to control noise.

Employers Duties

Employers are required to:

- assess the risks to employees from noise at work
- take action to reduce noise exposure that produces those risks
- provide employees with hearing protection, if noise exposure cannot be reduced enough by other means
- make sure legal limits on noise levels are not exceeded
- consult with employees and/or their representatives and provide information training
- make health surveillance available where there is a risk to employees’ health



Interpretations

Daily or weekly noise exposure level expressed in (Lex, 8h) (Db) (A) means the time-weighted average of the noise exposure level for a normal 8 hour working day.

Exposure action level means the level of daily noise exposure or peak sound pressure level which, if exceeded for any employee, requires specific action to be taken to reduce the risk. There are two exposure action values:

The upper exposure action value = 85dB(A).

The lower exposure action value = 80dB(A).

Where the upper exposure action value is exceeded, employees are required to use individual hearing protectors.

Exposure limit value means the level of daily noise exposure or peak sound pressure which must not be exceeded for any employee. The exposure limit value is 87dB(A).

Noise Risk Assessment

The employer shall carry out a risk assessment of the noise levels in the workplace. They shall consult with the employees and their representative on the risk assessment. The noise assessment shall be carried out at suitable intervals and any noise sampling shall be representative of the daily personal exposure of an employee. The methods and apparatus used in the measurement of noise at work must be suitable for the conditions and the length of exposure.



Risk Control

If the risk assessment indicates that the employees are likely to be exposed to noise above 85dB(A) an employer shall:

- Display mandatory warning signs
- Ensure hearing protectors are available and worn
- Ensure the work area is protected by barriers or other suitable means

The employer must evaluate other methods of work which eliminate or reduce exposure to noise. They must also consider the choice of work equipment, the design and layout of the place of work and workstations, noise reduction by technical means and limiting the duration of exposure.



Personal Protection

- Where the noise exposure exceeds 80dB(A) the employee shall make individual hearing protectors available
- Where the noise exposure exceeds 85dB(A) the employee shall make individual hearing protectors available and they must be used
- The selection of hearing protection must involve consultation with employees

Information, Training and Consultation

The employer shall, where his/her employees are exposed to noise at work at or above the lower exposure level, provide them and their representative with suitable and sufficient information, instruction and training relating to the risks from exposure to noise.

Training should cover:

- The nature of such risks
- The organisational and technical measures taken
- The exposure limit values and exposure action values
- The results of the risk assessment
- The correct use of hearing protectors
- Safe working practices
- Health Surveillance

Health Surveillance

The employer must ensure that appropriate health surveillance is made available to employees where the assessment reveals a risk to health. Where the exposure exceeds an upper exposure action value a hearing check must be completed by a registered medical practitioner. Where the exposure exceeds the lower exposure action value preventive audiometric testing should be provided. The reason for these tests is to provide early diagnosis of any hearing loss due to noise and to assist in the preservation of hearing. A record of all tests must be kept by the employer.

With regard to Hearing Test Reports the employer shall:

- On request allow an employee access to his/her personal health record
- Provide the H.S.A. with copies of such health records as required
- If the company ceases to trade, notify the Authority in writing and make all records available to the Authority

Where the result of hearing surveillance finds an employee to have identifiable hearing damage, a registered medical practitioner shall assess whether such damage is likely to be the result of exposure to noise at work. If it is so established every relevant employee shall be informed by the DR. of the results relating to him/her personally. The employer shall review the risk assessment and the measures taken to reduce or eliminate the risk.

