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Control of Noise at Work Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy has been produced in response to the Control of Noise at Work Regulations.
- 1.2 The Control of Noise at Work Regulations are hereafter referred to in this policy as the Noise Regulations.
- 1.3 In reviewing this policy, reference has been made to the Noise Regulations and the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) publications L108 and INDG 362 giving guidance on the Noise Regulations.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

- 2.1 The Council recognises that it has a duty to protect its employees, and others, from situations that may involve a risk to their health, safety and welfare, including the risk from noise.
- 2.2 The Council will take all reasonable steps necessary to ensure that the risk of hearing damage to employees who work with noisy equipment, or in a noisy environment, and to others, is reduced to a minimum.
- 2.3 The Council also recognises that noise levels below those which cause hearing damage, for example in offices, can still cause hearing problems, such as disturbance, interference with communications, and stress, and will take all reasonable steps to reduce noise levels as far as is reasonably practicable.
- 2.4 The term 'others' used in this policy includes members of the public, self-employed contractors, other employers' employees and visitors who may be affected by the Council's work activities.
- 2.5 Appendix A to this policy outlines the main responsibilities of both the Council, as the employer, and its employees.
- 2.6 The responsibility for implementing the provisions of this policy and for developing an implementation strategy rests with each Director or Head of Service.

POLICY GUIDANCE

3. REQUIREMENTS OF THE NOISE REGULATIONS

3.1 The Noise Regulations require employers to ensure that the risk from the exposure of employees to noise is either eliminated at source or, where this is not reasonably practicable, reduced to as low a level as is reasonably practicable (employees have duties under the Noise Regulations too).

3.2 The main requirements for employers under the Noise Regulations are to:

- assess the risks to employees from noise at work;
- take action to reduce the noise exposure that produces those risks;
- provide employees with hearing protection if the noise exposure cannot be reduced enough by using other methods;
- make sure the legal limits on noise exposure are not exceeded;
- provide employees with information, instruction and training;
- carry out health surveillance for employees where there is a risk to health.

3.3 The main requirements for employees under the Noise Regulations are to:

- use any noise control measures, such as exhaust silencers and machine enclosures (in accordance with instructions);
- wear hearing protection (in accordance with instructions) provided when exposed at or above the upper exposure action values and at all times in areas marked as hearing protection zones;
- take care of hearing protectors and any noise control equipment they need to use;
- report any defect found in hearing protectors or other protective measures, or any difficulties in using them;
- attend any health surveillance appointment when required to do so (during working hours and at the cost of the employer).

3.4 The Noise Regulations do not apply to:

- members of the public exposed to noise from their non-work activities, or making an informed choice to go to noisy places;
- low-level noise which is a nuisance but causes no risk of hearing damage.

4. **MEASURING NOISE**

4.1 Noise is measured in decibels (dB).

An 'A-weighting', written as dB(A), is used to measure average noise levels.

A 'C-weighting', written as dB(C), is used to measure peak, impact or explosive noises.

5. **NOISE ACTION LEVELS AND LIMIT VALUES**

5.1 The Noise Regulations require employers to take specific action at certain action values, which relate to:

- the levels of exposure to noise of employees averaged over a working day or week; and
- the maximum noise (peak sound pressure) to which employees are exposed to in a working day.

These values are:

- lower exposure action values:
 - daily or weekly exposure of 80 dB(A);
 - peak sound pressure of 135 dB(C).
- upper exposure action values:
 - daily or weekly exposure of 85 dB(A);
 - peak sound pressure of 137 dB(C).

There are also levels of noise exposure that must not be exceeded (taking into account any reduction in exposure provided by hearing protection), i.e.:

- exposure limit values:
 - daily or weekly exposure of 87 dB(A);
 - peak sound pressure of 140 dB(C).

6. **NOISE RISK ASSESSMENTS**

6.1 Whether or not noise is problematic at work depends on how loud it is and how long people are exposed to it.

As a simple guide, a risk assessment will probably need to be undertaken if any of the following apply:

- if the noise is intrusive for most of the day – like a busy street, a vacuum cleaner or a crowded restaurant;
- if employees have to raise their voices to carry out a normal conversation when only about 2m apart for at least part of the day;
- if employees use noisy powered tools or machinery for more than half an hour each day;
- if employees work in a noisy service area, e.g. road repair, construction or woodworking;
- if there are noises due to impacts (such as hammering, pneumatic impact tools) or explosive sources (such as cartridge operated tools or detonators).

The aim of the risk assessment is to help determine what is needed to ensure the health and safety of employees exposed to noise.

The assessment should:

- identify where there may be a risk from noise and who is likely to be affected;
- contain a reliable estimate of employees' exposures and compare those exposures with the exposure action and limit values;
- identify what needs to be done to comply with the law, e.g. whether noise control and/or hearing protection measures are required and, if so, where and what type;
- identify any employees who need health surveillance and whether any are particularly at risk.

It is essential to show that your estimate of employees' exposure takes into account the work employees are doing or are likely to do, the ways in which they do the work and how it might vary from one day to the next. Your estimate must be based on reliable information, for example measurements in the workplace and/or data from suppliers of machinery.

The risk assessment should be reviewed when:

- there is reason to suspect that it is no longer valid; or
- there is a change in the workplace, work activity or work equipment that affects noise levels or exposure times; or
- noise control measures have been introduced following a previous assessment and you need to determine their impact on employees' exposure; or
- health surveillance shows that employees' hearing is being damaged, suggesting that noise risks are not being properly controlled; or
- you become aware of new ways of working or improved noise control techniques that could be applied; or
- periodically on a regular basis anyway, e.g. every two years.

Risk assessments must only be undertaken by competent persons.

7. COMPETENT PERSONS

7.1 For the purpose of this policy, a competent person is one who is able to assess the risks from noise, take noise exposure readings, record and comment on results and recommend noise control measures.

8. RECORDS

8.1 The findings of the risk assessment must be recorded, including:

- those identified as being at risk, particularly those identified as needing health surveillance;
- an action plan identifying anything necessary to comply with the law and setting out what has already been done and what is going to be done, together with by whom and by when.

8.2 Records of any additional relevant information, such as:

- any noise exposure readings taken, including where, when and by whom;
- action taken as a result of any noise exposure readings, including where, when and by whom;
- changes in work practices that may affect noise exposure levels, such as the introduction of new machinery, changes in the layout of machinery, any noise reduction measures introduced;
- the supply of personal hearing protection, such as ear muffs and plugs, and details of its maintenance and replacement;
- complaints by employees about the effects of noise and action taken in respect of such complaints;
- health surveillance records.

9. REDUCTION OF RISK OF DAMAGE TO HEARING AND NOISE EXPOSURE

9.1 The purpose of the Noise Regulations, and also this policy, is to make sure that employees and others do not suffer damage to their hearing. Therefore, wherever there is noise at work, action must be taken to either eliminate the noise at source or to reduce the risk of damage to hearing to the lowest level reasonably practicable.

9.2 Where employees and others are likely to be exposed at or above the upper exposure action values, an appropriate planned programme of noise control must be implemented, excluding the provision of personal hearing protectors.

9.3 You must not permit an employee to be exposed above the exposure limit values and will need to check whether your programme of control measures, including in this case the provision of hearing protectors, is enough to prevent this level of exposure.

If you discover that an exposure limit value is exceeded, you must immediately take action to reduce exposure. Address the reasons for the overexposure by reviewing the programme of control measures. Consider the technical and organisational controls, the adequacy of any hearing protection supplied and the systems in place to ensure that noise control measures and hearing protection are fully and properly used and maintained.

- 9.4 Your risk assessment will have produced information on the risks and an action plan for controlling noise. Use this information to:
- tackle the immediate risk, e.g. by providing hearing protection;
 - identify what is possible to control noise, how much reduction could be achieved and what is reasonably practicable;
 - establish priorities for action and a timetable (e.g. consider where there could be immediate benefits, what changes may need to be phased in over a longer period of time and the number of people exposed to the noise in each case);
 - assign responsibilities to people to deliver the various parts of the plan;
 - ensure that the work on noise control is carried out;
 - check that what you have done has worked.
- 9.5 Consider the following organisational and technical measures as a means to reduce noise and noise exposure in the workplace:
- use different, quieter processes or machinery;
 - introduce a low-noise purchasing policy for machinery and equipment;
 - introduce engineering controls, e.g. isolate vibrating components from their surroundings with anti-vibration mountings, fit silencers to air exhausts;
 - modify the paths by which noise travels through the air to people, e.g. erect enclosures around machines, barriers and screens to block the direct path of sound or position machinery further away from people;
 - design and lay out the workplace for low noise emission, e.g. use absorptive materials to reduce reflected sound, locate noisy machinery and processes away from areas where people spend most of their time;
 - limit the time people spend in noisy areas;
 - regularly maintain machinery and equipment so as to keep it in good working order and prevent it deteriorating and becoming noisier.

10. HEARING PROTECTION

10.1 Hearing protection should not be used as an alternative to controlling noise by technical and organisational means.

10.2 Hearing protectors must be issued to employees when:

- they ask for them and the noise level they will be exposed to is between the lower and upper exposure action values, although their use in these circumstances is not mandatory;
- the noise level they will be exposed to will be at or above the upper exposure action values or the exposure limit values, when their use is mandatory.

11. HEARING PROTECTION ZONES

11.1 A 'hearing protection zone' is an area of a premises or site where the noise level will be at or above the upper exposure action values, or the exposure limit values, and the wearing of hearing protection is therefore mandatory.

11.2 Where a 'hearing protection zone' has been identified, then signs complying with the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations must be displayed informing people that:

- the area/building, as appropriate, is a hearing protection zone; and
- hearing protection must be worn when in that zone.

12. MAINTENANCE AND USE OF HEARING PROTECTION EQUIPMENT

12.1 The Council will ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that any hearing protection provided to employees and others in pursuance of this policy and the Noise Regulations is:

- suitable for the intended use;
- compatible with any other personal protective equipment provided to the user;
- maintained in good working order and clean condition; and
- fully and properly used.

- 12.2 All employees must fully and properly use any personal hearing protection provided to them when its use is mandatory, take care of any such personal hearing protection and comply with any other protective measures implemented in pursuance of this policy and the Noise Regulations. If an employee discovers any defect in the protective equipment provided, then he/she must report it to his/her manager for action immediately.
- 12.3 Failure by employees to comply with 12.2 above will be regarded as a serious matter and may lead to disciplinary action.

13. PROVISION OF INFORMATION, INSTRUCTION AND TRAINING

- 13.1 Where employees are likely to be exposed to noise levels above the lower exposure action levels, they must be provided with adequate information, instruction and training with regards to:
- the likely noise exposure and its risk to hearing;
 - the steps the Council are taking to control the risks and exposure;
 - where and how hearing protection can be obtained;
 - how to report defects in hearing protection and noise control equipment;
 - what their duties are under this policy and the Noise Regulations;
 - how to minimise the risk, such as the proper way to use hearing protection and other noise control equipment, how to look after it and store it, and when to use it; and
 - health surveillance.

14. HEALTH SURVEILLANCE

- 14.1 Health surveillance must be provided for employees who:
- are likely to be regularly exposed above the upper exposure action values; or
 - are at risk for any reason, e.g. they already suffer from hearing loss or are particularly sensitive to damage.

14.2 The purpose of health surveillance is to:

- give warning to the Council that employees might be suffering from early signs of hearing damage;
- give the Council an opportunity to prevent the damage getting worse; and
- check that control measures are working.

14.3 Health surveillance involves:

- regular hearing checks in controlled conditions carried out by someone with the appropriate training;
- informing employees about the results of their hearing checks;
- keeping health records; and
- ensuring employees are examined by a doctor where hearing damage is identified.

14.4 The health surveillance programme must be under the control of an occupational health professional e.g. a doctor or nurse with appropriate training and experience.

14.5 All employees shall, when required by the Council and at the Council's cost, present themselves during working hours for such health surveillance procedures as may be required.

14.6 After health surveillance is carried out, the Council must:

- keep records of the health surveillance and fitness-for-work advice provided for each employee (but not the confidential medical records that are kept by the doctor). A HSE inspector can ask to see the records to check if the Council is complying with the Noise Regulations;
- make employees records available to them;
- act upon any recommendations made by the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit about employees' continued exposure to noise; and
- use the results to review and, if necessary, revise the risk assessment and the plans to control risks.

15. DUTIES OF MANUFACTURERS AND SUPPLIERS UNDER OTHER REGULATIONS

15.1 Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Supply of Machinery (Safety) Regulations and the Noise Emission in the Environment by Equipment for Use Outdoors (Amendment) Regulations, manufacturers and suppliers must:

- provide equipment that is safe and without risk to health, with the necessary information to ensure it will be used to meet those aims, including any specific requirement for training of the operator to ensure that low noise exposures are achieved and sustained, and any requirements for training for those who will undertake maintenance of the machines;
- design and construct machinery so that the noise produced is as low as possible, taking into account technical progress and in particular looking to reduce noise at source;
- provide information about the noise the machine produces under actual working conditions, both in terms of average noise levels and peak noise levels;
- provide information to warn where there are risks from noise that have not been eliminated ('residual risks');
- provide information on the sound power emitted by some machines (sound power is a measure of the total sound energy produced by the machine); and
- meet set targets for the sound power emitted by some machines.

16. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

16.1 It is recommended that:

- each Division carries out an investigation to determine where noise exposure is likely to be at or above any of the exposure action or limit values;
- a competent person makes a suitable and sufficient assessment of those areas likely to be at or above any of the exposure action or limit values, and prepares and keeps appropriate records;
- appropriate action is taken to reduce, or where this is not possible control, the exposure to noise;

- employees are informed, instructed and trained to keep risks to a minimum;
- a health surveillance programme is implemented where appropriate; and
- appropriate systems are introduced to evaluate the effectiveness of control measures and to ensure that any necessary corrective action is implemented.

17. MAIN POINTS TO CONSIDER

17.1 Whilst accepting that in some instances the use of hearing protection by employees may be the only reasonably practicable method of controlling noise exposure, a continuing effort must be made to investigate and evaluate alternative methods, either by reducing noise levels or the time that employees are exposed to the those levels.

The four main features to consider at all times are assessment, control, protection and surveillance, as summarised below:

- **assessment** – carry out regular assessments of noise exposure to determine the magnitude of the problem;
- **control** – continue to investigate and evaluate methods of reducing noise levels and/or exposure times in order to find reasonable and practicable alternatives to the use of personal hearing protection;
- **protect** – provide employees with suitable and effective hearing protection until alternative reasonably practicable methods of controlling noise exposure become available, and provide information, instruction and training to ensure that the personal hearing protection is correctly used;
- **surveillance** – provide health surveillance to employees where appropriate and act upon any recommendations made as a result of that health surveillance.

17.2 Where an employee becomes aware that a problem has arisen with regards to noise in the workplace, the employee must inform his/her manager immediately.

17.3 Where an employee raises a matter related to noise in the workplace as a health and safety issue, then:

- all necessary steps must be taken to investigate the circumstances;
- corrective measures must be taken where appropriate; and
- the employee must be advised of the actions taken.

18. ADVICE

18.1 Advice on the implementation of this policy can be obtained from the Health and Safety Team, Human Resources, Ty Elai, Williamstown, telephone 01443 425531.

Appendix A – Summary of Employers and Employees Main Responsibilities

Action required where L _{EP,d} and/or L _{EP,w} is likely to be: (see notes 1 and 2 below)	Below Lower Exposure Action Values	At or Above Lower Exposure Action Values	At or Above Upper Exposure Action Values	At or Above Exposure Limit Values
	80 dB(A) and/or 135 dB(C)	80 dB(A) and/or 135 dB(C)	85 dB(A) and/or 137 dB(C)	87 dB(A) and/or 140 dB(C)
EMPLOYERS DUTIES				
General Duty to Reduce Risk				
Risk of hearing damage to be eliminated at source or reduced to the lowest level reasonably practicable (refer to Section 3 of this policy)	•	•	•	•
Assessment of Noise Exposure				
Suitable and sufficient noise assessment to be made by a competent person (refer to Section 6 of this policy)		•	•	•
Record of assessments to be kept until a new one is made (refer to Section 8 of this policy)		•	•	•
Noise Reduction				
Reduce exposure to noise as far as is reasonably practicable, excluding the provision of personal hearing protectors (refer to Section 9 of this policy)			•	
Ensure that employees are not exposed to noise above an exposure limit value - in this instance, control measures can include the provision of personal hearing protectors - or, if it is discovered that an exposure limit value is exceeded, then immediately take action to address the situation (refer to Section 9 of this policy)				•
Provision of Information to Workers				
Provide adequate information, instruction and training to employees (refer to Section 13 of this policy)		•	•	•
Identify hearing protection zones and mark them with suitable signs (refer to Section 11 of this policy)			•	•
Personal Hearing Protectors				
Ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that protectors are:				

Action required where LEP,d and/or LEP,w is likely to be: (see notes 1 and 2 below)	Below Lower Exposure Action Values 80 dB(A) and/or 135 dB(C)	At or Above Lower Exposure Action Values 80 dB(A) and/or 135 dB(C)	At or Above Upper Exposure Action Values 85 dB(A) and/or 137 dB(C)	At or Above Exposure Limit Values 87 dB(A) and/or 140 dB(C)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provided to employees who ask for them • provided to all employees exposed • used by all employees exposed • maintained in good working order and repaired or replaced as necessary (refer to Section 10 of this policy) <p>Ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that all who go in to a marked hearing protection zone use hearing protectors (refer to Section 11 of this policy and note 3 below)</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •
<p>Maintenance and Use of Equipment</p> <p>Ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all equipment provided under the Noise Regulations is used - except for the hearing protectors provided for between 80 and 85dB(A), whose use is not mandatory (refer to Section 10 of this policy) • all equipment is maintained (refer to Section 12 of this policy) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>Health Surveillance</p> <p>To be provided for employees who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are likely to be regularly exposed above the upper exposure action values, or • are at risk for any reason, e.g. they already suffer from hearing loss or are particularly sensitive to damage (refer to Section 14 of this policy) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<p>EMPLOYEES DUTIES</p>				
<p>Use of Equipment</p> <p>So far as is reasonably practicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use hearing protectors where their use is mandatory • use any other protective equipment • take care of equipment • report any defects discovered to manager (refer to Sections 3 & 12 of this policy) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •

Action required where $L_{EP,d}$ and/or $L_{EP,w}$ is likely to be: (see notes 1 and 2 below)	Below Lower Exposure Action Values	At or Above Lower Exposure Action Values	At or Above Upper Exposure Action Values	At or Above Exposure Limit Values
	80 dB(A) and/or 135 dB(C)	80 dB(A) and/or 135 dB(C)	85 dB(A) and/or 137 dB(C)	87 dB(A) and/or 140 dB(C)
Health Surveillance When required to do so (during working hours and at the cost of the employer) attend any health surveillance appointment (refer to Sections 3 & 14 of this policy)		•	•	•

- NOTES:**
1. The dB(A) action values are levels of daily ($L_{EP,d}$) or weekly ($L_{EP,w}$) personal exposure to noise.
 2. The dB(C) action values are levels of peak sound pressure, i.e. the maximum sound pressure to which an employee is exposed.
 3. This requirement applies to all who enter the zones, even if they do not stay long enough to receive an exposure of 85dB(A).

MANAGERS CHECKLIST

	✓ As Appropriate		
	N/A	Yes	No
• Have all potentially noisy work activities been identified?			
• Has a competent person(s) been designated to carry out noise assessments and to make recommendations as a result?			
• Has a noise assessment been carried out where employees are likely to be exposed to the 'lower exposure action values' or above?			
• Has action been taken as a result of the assessment to reduce noise levels and/or exposure times of employees or others, so far as is reasonably practicable?			
• Has suitable hearing protection been made available to employees and others who are likely to be exposed to the 'lower exposure action value' or above, but below the 'upper exposure action values'?			
• Is suitable hearing protection provided to and worn by employees and others who are likely to be exposed to or above the 'upper exposure action values' or the 'exposure limit values'?			
• Where a 'hearing protection zone' has been identified, has the area been clearly marked?			
• Is all hearing protection maintained in good order and to the required standards?			
• Has suitable information, instruction and training been provided to employees who are likely to be exposed to the 'lower exposure action values' or above?			
• Are appropriate training records being kept?			
• Are there monitoring procedures in place to ensure that the requirements of the policy are being met?			

Completed by: _____
(Signature)

Confirmed by: _____
(Signature)

Name: _____
(Print)

Name: _____
(Print)

Designation: _____

Designation: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____