

H8 – Toolbox Talk

Control of Noise at Work

The major aspect that must be considered when working in noisy environments is exposure to the noise, resulting in hearing impairment or total hearing loss.

'Noise' is unwanted excessive sound generated by plant when in operation. The company strives to reduce noise levels to the lowest reasonably practicable level.

- Only enter areas where the noise level has been established and the correct controls, including where appropriate, hearing protection have been applied/supplied.
- Areas of known high noise levels will be displayed on a plan available from your responsible manager. Notices will be displayed as appropriate.
- Where noise levels exceed the lower action level (80db) but are less than the upper action level, hearing protection will be made available and you are advised to wear it.
- Where noise levels exceed the upper action level, the company should provide suitable hearing protection and you must wear it. It is an offence for an employee to refuse to wear hearing protection in these circumstances.
- Only wear hearing protection provided by the company. Note: Cotton wool offers no protection whatsoever.
- Look after your hearing protection; keep it clean, replace it and report defects to your supervisor.
- You may be at risk when approaching others who are carrying out noisy activities, ie work with pneumatic hammers/drills, grinding, etc. Be aware, and warn those around you if you start noisy tasks.
- If you need to raise your voice to hold a conversation, you should be wearing your hearing protection.

The critical sound level when hearing protection should be worn is 80 decibels (dBA), established for an eight hour time weighted average. The louder and longer your exposure, whether at work, at home, or during recreation, the more likely your hearing will be damaged. If you want to get a sense of 'how loud is loud', the following examples, along with their decibel rating, will give you an idea:

- 20 — a faint whisper
- 30–40 — quiet pleasant sounds, eg a bird chirping
- 40–50 — quiet to normal office sounds
- 50–60 — normal conversation
- 70–90 — heavy machinery, electric motors, garbage disposal, city traffic
- 100–120 — jackhammer, power saw, motorcycle, lawn mower, rock music
- 140+ — nearly jet engine, gun shot (this level causes pain!).

Many disposable or reusable plugs are available, and most of these reduce noise by about 10–20 decibels. The noise reduction rating (NRR) is usually marked on the package.

Some degree of hearing loss is part of the normal ageing process, but young people should also be warned about the dangers of a rock concert, personal music device, lawn mower or loud car engine.



Training register

Date

Name of attendee	Signature
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