



NOISE AT WORK REGULATIONS

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 place a duty on employers within Great Britain to reduce the risk to their employees' health by controlling the noise they are exposed to whilst at work. Noise is part of everyday life, but too much noise can cause permanent and disabling hearing damage. This can be hearing loss that gets worse over time, damage caused by sudden, extremely loud noises, or tinnitus (permanent ringing in the ears).

With hearing damage, conversation becomes difficult or impossible, your family complains about the television being too loud, you have trouble using the telephone, and you may be unable to sleep. By the time you notice, it is probably too late!

The regulations were established under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and implement European Council directive 2003/10/EC. The regulations replaced the 'Noise at work regulations 1989' which previously covered noise in the workplace.



The regulations came into force for most industries on 6 April 2006, with the music and entertainment sectors coming into line two years later on 21 April 2008.

In Northern Ireland the legislation is dealt with in 'The Control of Noise at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006.

The 2005 Regulations use Upper and Lower Exposure Action Values to assess the severity of the noise exposure and what subsequent procedures need to be undertaken by the employer under law to comply with the regulations. The Action Values as defined by the LEP,d or



LEP,w (the worker's daily or weekly exposure to noise at work, normalised to an 8 hour day (or 5 day week respectively) and peak sound pressure level as stated in the 2005 Noise Regulations are detailed in the table below.

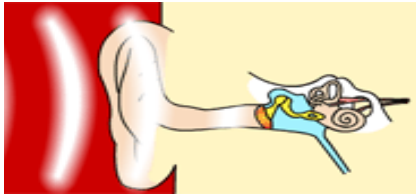
Daily or Weekly Personal Average Noise Exposure	Noise Level	Peak Sound Pressure Level	Actions
Lower Exposure Action Values	80dBA	135dBC	Undertake risk assessment. If any employees are identified as being particularly susceptible to noise, health surveillance should be implemented. Make hearing protection available. Establish a maintenance programme for equipment to reduce noise risk such as noise limiters and hearing protection. Provide training on noise induced hearing loss.
Upper Exposure Action Values	85dBA	137dBC	Establish and implement a programme of control measures. If these measures are not sufficient to reduce the exposure to below 85dBA then: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suitable hearing protection must be worn and; - Health surveillance programme implemented.
Exposure Limit Values	87dBA	140dBC	Reduce to below Limit Values (allowed to take hearing protection into account).

Hearing Loss

Noise can be more than just annoying, it can be dangerous. The noise regulations are in force to protect workers from noise induced hearing loss.

Before noise regulations were in force, many factory workers were exposed to high levels of noise for many years and as a result, workers often experienced hearing loss over time.

Hearing deteriorates over time for everyone (age related hearing loss), however, exposure to noise over certain levels exacerbates the process.



Tinnitus

Another detrimental effect that could possibly be caused by exposure to loud noise is a condition called Tinnitus, which is from the Latin word for "ringing".

Tinnitus is the perception of sound in the absence of corresponding external sound.

It is usually perceived as a ringing noise, but in some cases it can be a high pitched whining, buzzing, hissing, humming or whooshing. It can be very distressing for the sufferer.

The precise cause of tinnitus is still not fully understood. Experience of tinnitus can be common in all age groups, especially following exposure to loud noise.

With people being exposed to generally higher noise levels in bars, clubs and through headphones etc., consideration of hearing damage is becoming more necessary.

Music and Entertainment

Music and entertainment sectors are defined in the 2005 Noise Regulations as all workplaces where:

- live music is played or;
- recorded music is played in a restaurant, bar, public house, discotheque or nightclub, or alongside live music or a live dramatic or dance performance.

Within the music and entertainment sectors there is often a stigma attached to wearing hearing protection and for many performers it is often not recognised that the noise levels they are being exposed to could cause lasting damage to their hearing.

People in the know i.e. professional musicians, sound engineers, broadcasters etc. are aware of the dangers of high noise levels and take necessary precautions of wearing ear plugs.

However, the Regulations now cover employees of nightclubs and bars. Therefore, consideration of the levels of noise that bar and nightclub staff are exposed to must be evaluated and control measures implemented where necessary.

Employers Responsibility

By law, employers must assess and identify measures to eliminate or reduce risks from exposure to noise so that they can protect the hearing of their employees.

Where the risks are low, the actions you take may be simple and inexpensive, but where the risks are high you should manage them using a prioritised noise-control action plan.



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Hann Tucker can help!

To assess the implications for the employer of the 'Control of Noise at Work Regulations' 2005 will require a detailed investigation of workplace noise levels and employee working practices (i.e. individual exposure periods during a normal working day/week).

HTA has many years experience of undertaking such assessments, and understands the need for the employer to find a practical solution.

HTA can develop the most pragmatic approach to protecting employees from excessive occupational noise, and to satisfy the Health and Safety Executive Inspectors, by a variety of mitigation techniques.

Hann Tucker Associates, the leading independent UK acoustic consultancy, can provide all the necessary professional advice and assistance in order to ensure your employees are protected from excessive noise and your establishment is in compliance with the regulations.

