

Noise Assessments – Getting what you need

This information sheet provides information on what you should expect to see in a Noise Assessment. You can use it to;

- specify what you want when having a noise assessment carried out on your behalf, or
- decide if your noise assessment gives you the information you need to be able to carry out your duties as an employer.

Being subjected to loud noise causes deafness and other types of hearing damage. You as an employer have a duty under health and safety law to reduce the risk of hearing damage to their employees by controlling exposure to noise (*Noise at Work Regulations 1989*). To carry out this duty, you need to know which employees are at risk, and what the level of that risk is. Also, in order to make a plan to tackle noise problems, you need to know what is causing the risk (what processes, machines, etc) and what are the priorities for action.

The key to obtaining this information is the Noise Assessment. The *Noise Regulations* require the employer to obtain an *adequate* noise assessment, which will *facilitate* compliance with duties relating to controlling noise exposure, providing suitable hearing protection, marking out ear protection zones and giving information, instruction and training to employees.

The question is, how do you, as an employer, know what an *adequate* assessment consists of? It is up to the employer to take reasonable steps to satisfy himself or herself that the assessment meets the requirements of the regulations, even if the assessment is carried out by someone outside the company (such as a consultant).

The checklist at the end of this leaflet can help you; it shows you what you should or could expect to see in three different standards of noise assessment, starting with the minimum legal requirement.

The Noise Assessment is the start of the process, not the end. Don't just file your assessment away. Use it to carry out your duties to reduce the risk of hearing loss and control noise exposure.

In brief, a noise assessment should:

- State whether you have a noise problem,
- Tell you which employees are at risk, and why,
- Give you enough information to let you prioritise and plan the work needed to control the risks,
- Let you know what to do about the immediate risk (hearing protection, warning signs),
- Help you to instruct, inform and train your employees about these issues.

There are some tell-tale signs that a noise assessment is **not** adequate, such as;

- Noise measurements don't relate to the jobs or tasks people carry out – they are simply spot readings taken around the workplace.
- Noise exposures ($L_{EP,d}$) are not quoted.
- No reference to legal duties (Noise at Work Regulations 1989) or Action Levels.

Some noise assessments provide lots of information; they can be quite thick documents. Whilst there is nothing wrong with providing extra information, you should make sure that the assessment actually gives you the information you need (the minimum legal requirement) to carry out your duties. Extra information is worth having only if it further helps you to control and reduce the risks.

The noise assessment should be reviewed if there is reason to believe that it is no longer valid (e.g. new machinery installed, change in working practices, layout of the workplace changed). Good practice would be to carry out an informal review every two years, to decide whether a full review is necessary.

Specify the noise assessment correctly, check that you get what you need, and then use it to plan and carry out your work on noise control and risk reduction. Protect your employees and comply with the law.

Noise Assessment Checklist

The checklist that follows shows you what you should or could expect to see in three different standards of noise assessment; one which meets the minimum legal requirements (**'Adequate'**), one carried out by a person showing a good knowledge of the legal and technical aspects of noise and its control (**'More than Adequate'**), and one produced to a very high standard, showing a high level of experience and competence on the part of the person who produced it (**'First-rate'**).

Content	Adequate	More than Adequate	First-rate
	(Minimum legal requirement)		
Purpose of assessment (legal basis)		√	√
Identification of those employees likely to be at risk of hearing damage (either names of employees, named groups of employees, or named tasks)	√	√	√
Daily personal noise exposure ($L_{EP,d}$) of those likely to be exposed at or above the first action level (calculated from levels of noise and times of exposure during working day)	√	√	√
Levels of noise and times of exposure during working day used to calculate $L_{EP,d}$		√	√
Peak noise exposure of those likely to be exposed at or above the peak action level	√	√	√
Indication of employer's and employees' legal duties relevant to levels of exposure.	√	√	√
Identification of sources of noise giving rise to the risk	√	√	√
Summary of existing noise control measures		√	√
Comment on effectiveness of existing noise control measures			√
Suggestions for priorities for control of noise (where necessary)		√	√
Hearing protection	State whether what is currently in use is adequate.	√	√
	Suggestions for suitable alternatives.	√	√
	Which areas require marking as 'Ear Protection Zones' (and correct sign to use)	√	√
	Reference to criteria (BS EN 458) for selection of 'suitable' hearing protectors		
Name of person responsible for the assessment	√	√	√
List of equipment used		√	√

Content	Adequate	More than Adequate	First-rate
	(Minimum legal requirement)		
Description of work activities assessed	√	√	√
Photographs		√	√
Annotated sketch plans of work areas		√	√
Information on requirements for health surveillance (hearing checks) (where necessary)		√	√
Suggested noise control solutions			√
Reference to and/or copies of relevant published noise control solutions (e.g. HSE industry-specific guidance)		√	√
Reference to and/or copies of general published guidance and information on noise (i.e. to facilitate training of employees).	√	√	√
Employee training materials (e.g. a handout)			√
Advice on low-noise purchasing policy			√
Glossary of terms		√	√

This sheet was produced by the Engineering Industry Noise Task Group (see <http://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/who.htm>) with the grateful assistance of Tim Ward, HSE Noise and Vibration Specialist