

**England, Scotland and
Wales**

The Control of Noise at
Work Regulations 2005

Northern Ireland

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Work Regulations
(Northern Ireland) 2006

Noise at Work

Loud noise at work can damage your hearing. It may only be when the damage caused by noise combines with hearing loss due to ageing that people realise how impaired their hearing has become.

What are the hazards?

Noise at work can cause hearing damage that is permanent and disabling. This is usually gradual from the exposure to noise over time, but damage can also be caused by sudden, extremely loud noises. The damage is disabling in that loss of hearing can stop people from being able to understand speech, keep up with conversations or use the telephone.

Hearing loss is not the only problem. It can cause tinnitus (ringing, whistling, buzzing or humming in the ears), which can lead to disturbed sleep, fatigue, stress, depression, anxiety and other conditions.

Noise at work can interfere with communications and make warnings harder to hear. It can also reduce a person's awareness of his or her surroundings. These factors can lead to safety risks—even putting people at risk of injury or death.

Do I have a noise problem?

You will probably need to do something about the noise if any of the following apply:

- The noise is intrusive—like a busy street, a vacuum cleaner or a crowded restaurant—or worse than intrusive, for most of the working day
- Your employees have to raise their voices to have a normal conversation when about two metres apart for at least part of the day
- Your employees use noisy powered tools or machinery for more than 30 minutes a day
- Your sector is one known to have noisy tasks, such as construction, demolition, road repair, woodworking, plastics processing, engineering, textile manufacture, general fabrication, forging or stamping, paper or board making, canning or bottling, foundries, waste and recycling
- There are noises due to impacts (such as hammering, drop forging, pneumatic impact tools, etc.), explosive sources such as cartridge-operated tools or detonators, or guns



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Situations to consider safety issues in relation to noise include the following:

- You use warning sounds to avoid or alert to dangerous situations.
- Working practices rely on verbal communications.
- There is work around mobile machinery or traffic.

Noise levels

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations requires employers to take specific action at certain action values. These relate to:

- The levels of exposure to noise of your employees averaged over a working day or week; and
- The maximum noise (peak sound pressure), measured in decibels (dB), to which employees are exposed in a working day.

Lower Exposure Action Values	Upper Exposure Action Values
Daily or weekly exposure of 80 dB	Daily or weekly exposure of 85 dB
Peak sound pressure of 135 dB	Peak sound pressure of 137 dB

There are also levels of noise exposure which must not be exceeded. These are called exposure limit values:

Exposure Limit Values
Daily or weekly exposure of 87 dB
Peak sound pressure of 140 dB

How can I control noise?

There are many ways of reducing noise and noise exposure. Nearly all businesses can decide on practical, cost-effective actions to control noise risks.

First, think about how to remove the source of noise altogether, such as housing a noisy machine where it cannot be heard by workers. If that is not possible, investigate other risk controls like the following:

- Using quieter equipment or a different, quieter process
- Engineering/technical controls to reduce at source the noise produced by a machine or process
- Using screens, barriers, enclosures and absorbent materials to reduce the noise on its path to the people exposed
- Designing and setting up the workplace to create quiet workstations
- Limiting the time people spend in noisy areas

Choosing quieter equipment and machinery

You should consider noise alongside other factors (such as general suitability and efficiency) when hiring or buying equipment. Compare the noise data from different machines, as this will help you to buy from among the quieter ones.

When should personal hearing protection be used?

Hearing protection should be issued to employees in the following situations:

- Where extra protection is needed above what has been achieved using noise control
- For short-term protection, while other methods of controlling noise are being developed

You should not use hearing protection as an alternative to controlling noise by technical and organisational means.

Employees to whom you provide hearing protection should receive training in how to use it properly.

Detecting hearing damage

If the risk assessment indicates that there is a health risk for employees exposed to noise, they should be placed under suitable health surveillance that includes regular hearing checks.

Case Study # 1:

Scenario	The solution
A woman working in the textiles industry only realised something needed to be done about her hearing loss when, at the age of 40, she couldn't hear the phone ringing any more.	Such hearing loss could have been prevented in the short term with hearing protection. In the long term, other ways of reducing exposure could have included quieter machines, maintenance, and changing job patterns.

(Cont.)

Case Study # 2:

Scenario	The solution
<p>A risk assessment revealed that the noise level at the operator's position of a metal cutting guillotine was very high, at 92 dB.</p>	<p>After taking technical advice, the employers ensured the guillotine was fully serviced and its hydraulics overhauled. In addition, a collecting tray was fitted with rollers and covered with carpet, to reduce the impact of falling offcut metal.</p> <p>As a result, the noise level at the operator's position was reduced by 8 dB to 84 dB.</p>