

If I can't reduce the noise levels further, what do I do about hearing protection?

Find suitable types of hearing protection

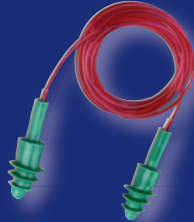
Roll down foam earplugs

Usually made from foam and designed to expand to fill the ear canal. Often known as 'disposable' because they are usually worn once and thrown away.



Reusable earplugs

Commonly pre-shaped with no need to roll down, the user does not have to touch the part that goes into the ear. Can be taken out and re-inserted when they leave and re-enter a noisy area. Can be washed and re-used.



Custom moulded earplugs

Pre-moulded to exactly fit the ear canal of a single individual. Can also be washed and re-used.



Banded earplugs

A band that goes under the chin with pods that sit in the entrance to each ear canal. Ideal if moving in and out of noisy areas but can be dislodged if bending or stretching.



Earmuffs

Foam filled cups which cover each ear, on a headband that acts as a tension spring to keep them in place. Can also be fitted to safety helmets.



The most important things to remember about hearing protection

- Hearing protection is a last resort but must be used until noise risks are under control.
- Choose the correct level of protection. This will not usually be the highest available.
- Make sure it is suitable for the user and their work activities, and that they can use it comfortably with any other PPE or equipment they have to wear or use.
- Ensure they wear it at all times in the noisy area. If they remove it, even briefly, they will have wasted most of the time they have spent wearing it. For example, removing protection for just 5 minutes out of one hour will reduce the protection achieved by more than half.

How can we protect our hearing on an everyday basis?

- Don't stick dirty objects in our ears
- Turn down the volume of what we listen to
- Reduce the noise level or be further away from it
- Reduce the length of time you are in the noisy area
- Buy quiet - find low noise models when replacing or hiring machinery
- Wear hearing protection to reduce the noise level at the ear

See how important it is to wear it all the time it's needed at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/hearingprotection/index.htm>

SO TAKE SOME STRAIGHTFORWARD ACTION NOW AND AVOID LONG TERM DAMAGE WHEN IT'S TOO LATE TO CORRECT IT

Listen today, hear tomorrow...

Please let us know if you found this information useful.

If you have any comments visit

www.bsif.co.uk or e-mail enquiries@bsif.co.uk



Hearing protection is a last resort - tips on how to get the most from it

- **Avoid your workforce suffering damage that will affect them and their families permanently for years to come**
- **Easy ways to identify noise levels that require action. See all the options**
- **Develop a sound safety programme to keep business costs down**
- **Apply known technical and management noise control measures - use hearing protection until noise is reduced to safe levels**

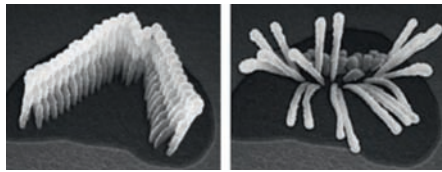


Download more copies and a workplace poster here.



Take care of your hearing

Noise waves move 'hair' cells inside your ear. Once those cells are damaged they can no longer send signals to your brain, so you no longer hear the noise.



Healthy cells

Damaged cells

Hearing can be permanently damaged; it will not recover!

Almost 10 million people in the UK today are deaf or have some degree of hearing loss...that's almost 1 in 6 people! This figure is expected to rise to around 14.5 million by 2031 (source: Action on Hearing Loss).



Employers have a responsibility not to damage the hearing of those who work for them. Prosecutions against employers and legal claims by workers are both rising, with an estimated 80,000 claims in 2013 with compensation payouts up to £70,000. The total cost of deafness claims is currently £70 million per year. A poor claims history for deafness claims against your company may increase insurance premiums, so a good safety program not only avoids harm to your workers and colleagues, it really is good for your business!

Hearing damage is often gradual and therefore difficult to notice. It can be temporary or permanent.

Temporary hearing loss

Can be caused by ear infections, wax, pressure changes (e.g. in an aeroplane), trauma, or a few hours in a noisy workplace, pub or club. It should wear off, and ear infections can usually be treated.

Permanent hearing loss

Can be caused by the ageing process and illness, but also by regular exposure to loud noises.

This type of hearing loss cannot be repaired – once lost, it stays lost! Hearing loss is not the only problem. You may develop tinnitus; a constant ringing, whistling, buzzing or humming in the ears. This is a distressing condition which can lead to stress and disturbed sleep.

How loud is too loud?

You cannot always tell if a noise is loud enough to damage your hearing. You get used to noise so your perception is skewed. To help control potentially harmful noise, exposure action and limit values are set by legislation. The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 set daily personal noise exposure action and limit values. If these values are likely to be exceeded you must take certain actions:

Myth

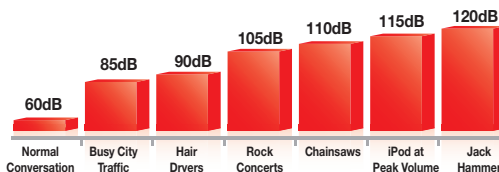
It is best to use the highest level of protection you can get.

Incorrect

Users will find it uncomfortable and isolating if they use too high a level of protection. They will be more likely to remove it. You should choose the correct level of protection for the level and duration of the noise hazard.

Noise Levels

This chart provides examples of common place noises



dangerousdecibels.org: WSJ Research
For more information on personal noise exposure see HSE document L108 <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l108.htm>

How can I check if the noise is too loud?

There are several ways to find out if the noise you or your workforce is exposed to could be harmful:

1. Check it yourself:

- Do I have to shout to talk to someone when they are about 6 feet away?
- Do I 'feel' the noise or do I tense up when the noise starts?
- Do I relax, or feel relief, when the noise stops or I walk away?
- Can I only 'hear' someone when they are looking at me but can't when they look away?

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions then the noise level may be harmful to hearing.

2. Download one of the many 'noise apps' that are available to your mobile device and try it. It will give you a rough guide as to whether you need to take some actions because of the noise levels.

3. If 1 or 2 suggest you have harmful noise levels at work you need to take action and seek advice. You can also check guidance on the HSE website www.hse.gov.uk/noise. It may be useful to arrange for a workplace noise assessment from a qualified person.

How do I protect myself and my workforce from hearing damage if the noise is too loud?

Apply the Hierarchy of Control, opposite. It is a structured approach to preventative measures, managing the risk when planning the job and protecting employees from noise without having to rely on hearing protection. Follow this and hearing protection may not be necessary.



Myth

You won't hear anything when wearing hearing protection.

Incorrect

Wearing hearing protection does not block out all sound, it simply reduces it – you actually hear more than you think you are going to!

Hierarchy of Control

Stage 1: Eliminate the noise.

Can the noisy process or equipment that generates the noise be replaced completely? Can the process be changed so that it doesn't create hazardous noise?

If the noise cannot be eliminated...

Stage 2: Substitute the noise.

Can the noisy process be undertaken in a different, quieter way, Can you substitute a quieter component for a noisy one (e.g. gearbox), can you squeeze instead of punch etc?

If the process, or equipment, cannot be made quieter...

Stage 3: Limit the transmission of noise.

Can you dampen vibrating panels, fit silencers to exhausts, acoustically screen or enclose noisy components, reduce impacts, provide noise havens at work stations? Can the noisy activity be moved to an area where other workers will not be exposed to the noise?

If the noise cannot be engineered out...

Stage 4: Implement administrative controls.

Make it your policy to buy or hire low noise equipment. Ensure maintenance gives suitable priority to noise. Ensure your training, health surveillance, etc, are fit for purpose. Plan your workplace to limit the number of people on noisy activities and keep people on quiet work in quiet places.

If administrative controls are not enough...

Stage 5: Provide personal protective equipment (PPE).

For noise, PPE is hearing protection. Control access to noisy areas (hearing protection zones). Provide suitable hearing protection to all employees and visitors who are required to enter noisy areas, providing instruction and training to ensure it is worn correctly. See page 4 for tips on how to improve the effectiveness of your hearing protection programme.

Remember that the use of hearing protection as a long term noise control is the last resort. It should only be used as a control method to complement other control measures you have in place to reduce the risk caused by the hazard – PPE and administrative controls should not be the only measures taken to protect against noise.

