

Dawlish Town Council

Policy on Noise at Work

1. Statement of Policy

Excessive noise levels can cause permanent damage to hearing. Such damage typically occurs over many years and the deterioration may not be noticed until it is too late. Noise induced hearing loss can seriously affect the quality of people's home life in addition to affecting their work.

People's hearing naturally deteriorates as part of the ageing process. This loss of hearing acuity is known as presbycusis and is not avoidable. Noise induced hearing loss is caused by exposure to excessive noise levels at work, although for some individuals their leisure activities may contribute significantly. Noise induced hearing loss is preventable.

Noise may be irritating at quite low levels and can be disruptive to one's concentration and therefore affect work. Legislation, however, is concerned with controlling exposure to noise levels that may damage hearing. The Noise at Work Regulations 1989 set out noise levels (see appendix 1) above which employers are required to take certain steps. These levels are known as action levels. As a rough guide noise is excessive if one has to shout to be heard by someone with unimpaired hearing standing approximately 2 metres away.

The above Regulations place various duties on employers including a requirement to reduce the risk of damage to employees' hearing from exposure to noise to the lowest level reasonably practicable (reg. 6). There is a requirement to carry out a noise assessment where any employee is likely to be exposed to noise exceeding an action level (reg. 4). A summary of the requirements of the Noise at Work Regulations is given in appendix 2.

Regulation 5 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 is relevant to the subject of noise. Under this regulation employees who are at risk of hearing damage should be subject to appropriate health surveillance. A noise assessment should identify who is at risk of hearing damage and these people should receive health surveillance in the form of audiometry.

The arrangements given in this policy should assist the Council in meeting its' legal and moral responsibilities to protect Council employees from damage to their hearing caused by work activities.

2. Organisation and Arrangements

2.1 Town Clerk

will :-

- ensure that risk assessments carried out in areas and for activities under his control give adequate consideration to the need for noise assessments;
- ensure that noise assessments are carried out where the general risk assessment indicates that this is necessary. Noise assessment is a specialist task and will normally be carried out by a specialist.
- arrange for appropriate action to be taken to adequately control noise exposure in accordance with the findings of the noise assessment;
- liaise with the health safety and welfare officer with regard to arranging health surveillance for employee(s) found by the noise assessment to be at risk of hearing damage;
- liaise with the health safety and welfare officer to ensure that noise assessments are reviewed at regular intervals or whenever there is reason to believe that the assessment is no longer valid;
- ensure that staff under their control are aware of any risk of damage to their hearing and of the precautions necessary to avoid such damage;
- consider noise levels when selecting equipment for purchase. Where equipment is of a type known to be noisy the supplier should be asked to provide information on expected noise levels.
- in liaison with relevant staff , undertake noise risk assessments where the general risk assessment shows this to be necessary;
- in liaison with relevant staff, arrange audiometry for any employee found by the noise assessment to be at risk. This type of health surveillance would normally be appropriate for workers who are regularly exposed to the second or the peak action levels or above.

2.3 All staff

- will make proper use of any equipment provided to control noise exposure (including ear protectors);
- will report any defect in equipment provided to reduce noise exposure.

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Appendix 1

Action levels for noise exposure as specified in the Noise at Work Regulations 1989

There are three action levels defined in regulation 2 of the Noise at Work Regulations. The first and second action levels relate to a person's average daily exposure to noise. There is also a peak action level which is intended to protect workers from noise of short duration such as percussive noise.

It is recognised that the extent of hearing damage depends not only on the sound level to which a worker is exposed, but also on the duration of exposure. For this reason the first and second action levels are defined in terms of a time weighted average personal exposure (taken over an 8 hour day).

Certain of the regulations apply only where action levels are exceeded.

The action levels are :-

- First action level – a daily personal noise exposure ($L_{EP,d}$) of 85 dB(A);
- Second action level – daily personal exposure ($L_{EP,d}$) of 90 dB(A);
- Peak action level – a peak sound pressure of 200 pascals*;

* equivalent to a "C" weighted peak level of 140 dB(C)

Appendix 2

Summary of the Noise at Work Regulations 1989

- Reg 1 Names the regulations and gives a commencement date.
- Reg 2 Defines terms including the action levels.
- Reg 3 Specifies where the regulations apply and where they do not.
- Reg 4 Requires employers to make and if necessary revise, noise assessments where employees are likely to be exposed to noise at or above the first action level or the peak action level.
- Reg 5 Requires that adequate records are made and kept of the noise assessment (see reg. 4).
- Reg 6 Imposes a duty on employers to reduce the risk of hearing damage to employees to the lowest level reasonably practicable.
- Reg 7 Applies when the second or peak action levels are likely to be exceeded. Requires employers to reduce the noise exposure of employees so far as is reasonably practicable.
- Reg 8 Deals with ear protection. Where the noise exposure is at or above the first action level but below the second, then employers must provide ear protectors if the employees request it. Where the second or the peak action level is likely to be reached or exceeded then employers must provide ear protection designed to reduce exposure to below these levels.
- Reg 9 Requires employers to designate “ear protect zones” in parts of the premises where employees are likely to be exposed to the second or peak action levels or above.
- Reg 10 Places a duty on the employer to ensure that equipment provided to control noise is properly used and maintained in good condition. Also requires employees to use equipment provided (including ear protectors) and to report defects.

- Reg 11 Employees who are likely to be exposed to noise at or above the first or peak action level must be provided with adequate information, instruction and training. This should cover the risk of hearing damage, what the employee can do to protect themselves, how to obtain ear protectors and the employees duties under the Regulations.
- Reg 12 Applies to equipment manufacturers where that equipment may give rise to noise exposures at or above the first or the peak action levels. In these cases manufacturers are required to provide adequate information on the noise likely to be generated.

Regs 13-15 are of administrative interest only.