



## **Unite briefing**

### **The need to reduce noise at work**

The hazards from noise are obvious in industries such as heavy engineering, paper manufacturing, quarrying and steel production. But noise is also a hazard to workers in other sectors such as the service industries, the office environment, schools and hospitals, call centres and the entertainment industry.

For years employers have been aware that workplace noise can cause permanent deafness, temporary hearing loss and other ear conditions. Unfortunately thousands of workers are still suffering as a result of exposure to excessive noise in their workplaces. Consequently, hearing loss caused by exposure to noise at work continues to be a significant occupational disease. Recent research estimates that 170,000 workers in the UK suffer from a noise related illness.

Any loss or reduction in hearing can have a devastating affect on the quality of life of the sufferer both in the workplace and at home. Therefore it is important to ensure your employer treats the risk of workplace noise seriously.

As a union representative you don't need to understand the mathematical concept of the decibel (dB) or the Pascal - but you do need to know the noise levels at which your employer must take action to comply with regulations.

### **The Noise at Work Regulations**

- The first action level of 80 dB(A).
- The second action level of 85dB(A).
- The third action level 140 Pascal.

The following table shows the comparison between the Noise at Work Regulations 1989 and the regulations which were amended in 2006.

<b>Regulation provision</b>	<b>Noise at Work Regulations 1989</b>	<b>Amended regulations 2006</b>
<b>Risk Reduction:-</b>	to lowest level reasonably practicable	<b>eliminate at source or reduce to a minimum - apply the principle of prevention</b>
<b>Assess exposure where workers are:-</b>	likely to be exposed to first action level	<b>exposed or likely to be exposed to the risk from noise</b>
<b>Assessment period:-</b>	8 hours	<b>8 hours or one week</b>
<b>Provide information and training to workers and their representatives:-</b>	85 dB(A)	<b>80 dB(A)</b>
<b>Workers' right to hearing checks / audiometric testing:-</b>	85 dB(A) by or under the responsibility of a doctor	<b>85 dB(A) by or under the responsibility of a doctor. 80 dB(A) to be available where a risk is indicated</b>
<b>Health surveillance:-</b>	-	<b>ensure appropriate health surveillance where a risk is indicated</b>
<b>Make suitable and efficient hearing protection available:-</b>	85 dB(A)	<b>80 dB(A)</b>
<b>Ensure suitable and efficient hearing protection is worn:-</b>	90 dB(A)	<b>85 dB(A), ear protection selected to eliminate risk or reduce to a minimum</b>
<b>Exposure limit:-</b>	-	<b>87 dB(A) at the ear</b>
<b>Programme of control measures:-</b>	90 dB(A)	<b>85 dB(A)</b>
<b>Provide hearing protection zones:-</b>	where reasonably practicable 90 dB(A)	<b>85 dB(A) where technically feasible and the risk of exposure justifies it</b>
<b>Workers and their representatives to receive information:-</b>	85 dB(A) - information on assessments 90 dB(A) - on programmes of measures	<b>must comply with earlier Directive as a minimum</b>

Union representatives should ensure their employer assesses all areas where noise is present and be given access to the results. The noise assessment should be carried out under normal working conditions, with all noisy processes in operation. The person who conducts the assessment must be competent to assess noise. The noise measurement should be taken using a

sound level meter that meets current UK standards – the instrument should be calibrated before each test. The results of the test must be recorded and reviewed when necessary, for example when new equipment is installed or when old equipment becomes noisier. The HSE has produced guidance for employers, which can be downloaded [here](#) (pdf, 240KB).

### **More information**

- Unite, [Noise](#)
- **The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005**
- European Agency, [European Health and Safety Week](#)
  
- European Directive on [Physical Agents \(Noise\)](#)
  
- HSE, [Noise](#)
  
- HSE, [noise and vibration regulations roadshows](#)
  
- [The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005](#)
  
- [The Noise at Work Regulations 1989](#)
  
- TUC, [Noise at work, a safety reps guide](#)