

Toolbox Talk – Noise

Introduction

The work environment and many construction work activities and equipment produce harmful levels of noise. Workers are at risk of suffering permanent damage to their hearing; we must take steps to protect ourselves from the effects of exposure to excessive noise.

Background

The Noise at Work Regulations place a duty on employers to manage the risk from excessive noise by undertaking a risk assessment and as far as reasonably practicable, dealing with the source of the noise. We must try to eliminate the noise hazard by doing the task in a different way, by avoiding the task, or reducing noise levels by using quieter equipment.

Other measures include limiting the time people are exposed and increasing the distance from the source of the noise, and / or reducing the levels of noise by enclosures, sound barriers and sound absorbing materials. As a last resort, suitable hearing protection is to be provided and worn.

What you need to know

1. Sound levels are measured in decibels dB(A) and averaged over an 8-hour reference period. Where sound levels reach 80dB(A), employers must provide ear protection when requested. At 85dB(A) **they must be provided and worn**. Many activities can expose you to levels in excess of 85 decibels.
2. Excessive noise causes damage to the hair-like nerve cells in your inner ear. If you do not protect your ears, you can suffer from permanent hearing loss, tinnitus (ringing sounds) and other symptoms such as lack of sleep, anxiety and depression. Following instruction and wearing ear protection will prevent damage to your ears.

What you need to do

1. Observe safety instructions and signage to wear ear protection.
2. Wear / fit ear protection properly (follow instructions on packaging or supplied with item).
3. Wear your ear protection even if others do not.
4. Keep ear defenders clean and report any defects.
5. Do not re-use disposable ear buds.
6. Do not handle ear defenders with unclean hands.
7. Make sure you clean re-useable ear buds before inserting them.
8. If you cannot get on with the ear protection you have, ask for another type.
9. If you and the other person need to raise your voice when having a conversation 2 metres away, it is likely that sound levels are at or above 85dB(A) – you should wear ear protection.

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