Control of Noise At Work Policy

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1.0 Policy Statement

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council will put in place measures to protect its staff from the risks of noise induced hearing loss and tinnitus, both of which can be caused by exposure to excessive noise.

The measures will include:

   a) Assessing the risks from noise exposure.
   b) Taking measures to reduce noise exposure where a risk assessment shows that this is necessary.
   c) Ensuring the level of noise generated is taken into account whenever a new piece of equipment is purchased or hired.
   d) Providing hearing protection where necessary (if risks cannot be adequately reduced by other means).
   e) Providing training and information for employees on the risks from noise and the measures in place to reduce these.
   f) Providing health surveillance to staff where the risk assessment shows that this is appropriate.
   g) Reviewing the noise assessments to ensure control measures continue to be effective and to ensure any new opportunities for reducing risk are not missed.

This will enable the Council to satisfy its obligations under the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

This policy does not cover the environmental aspects of noise and noise pollution, or the adverse effects on wellbeing which can arise from ‘nuisance’ noise which is below the level likely to cause hearing loss.

“Prolonged exposure to noise at work can cause hearing loss, which is often permanent. Hearing loss caused by work is preventable, but once your hearing has gone it won’t come back”.

Health & Safety Executive
2.0 Definitions

2.1 Decibel (dB)
The unit of measurement for loudness of a sound. The higher the dB the louder the sound.

2.2 A-Weighted Decibel Scale
A-weighted decibels, abbreviated dBA, or dBa, or dB(a), are an expression of the relative loudness of sounds in air as perceived by the human ear. In the A-weighted system, the decibel values of sounds at low frequencies are reduced, compared with unweighted decibels, in which no correction is made for audio frequency. This correction is made because the human ear is less sensitive at low audio frequencies, especially below 1000 Hz, than at high audio frequencies.

2.3 C-Weighted Decibel Scale
The response of the human ear varies with the sound level. At higher levels, 100dB and above, the ear's response is flatter. Although the A-Weighted response is used for most applications, C-Weighting is also available on many sound level meters. C Weighting is usually used for Peak measurements and also in some entertainment noise measurement, where the transmission of bass noise can be a problem. C-weighted measurements are expressed as dBC or dB(C).

2.4 Lower Exposure Action Value
a) a daily or weekly personal noise exposure of 80dB (A weighted); and,
b) a peak sound pressure level of 135dB (C weighted).

2.5 Upper Exposure Action Value
a) a daily or weekly personal noise exposure of 85dB (A weighted); and,
b) a peak sound pressure level of 137dB (C weighted).
Wherever exposure at or above these levels occurs, certain actions are required. Where exposure is very varied, average exposure may be calculated over a week rather than a day.

2.6 Exposure Limit Value

a) a daily or weekly personal noise exposure of 87dB (A weighted); and,
b) a peak sound pressure level of 140dB (C weighted).

This is the maximum sound exposure permitted for any individual and takes hearing protection into account i.e. it is the actual sound exposure of the individual ‘at the ears’ following any attenuation from hearing protection.

2.7 Daily Noise Exposure Level (LEPd or LEX)

This is the time-weighted average of the levels of noise to which a worker is exposed for a nominal eight hour working day, taking account of the level of noise and the duration of exposure, and covering all noise, including short term impulsive noise. Personal noise exposure is a function of noise level and length of exposure. An individual working in an area where the noise level was a constant 80dB would have a personal exposure of 80dB if he or she worked there for 8 hours.
3.0 Is Noise a Problem? - When To Risk Assess

3.1 A noise risk assessment is required wherever it is likely that exposure will occur at or above the lower exposure value.

As a guide to this, the following may be considered:

- If noise is intrusive but normal conversation is possible, likely noise level is approx 80dB.
- If you have to shout to talk to someone 2m away, likely noise level is approx 85dB.
- If you have to shout to talk to someone 1m away, likely noise level is approx 90dB.

The decibel (dB) scale used to measure noise is logarithmic. An increase in 3dB equates to a doubling of sound. For example, two identical mowers, alone generating 100dB of noise, would generate 103dB when measured together. The increase from 80dB to 85dB is therefore almost a four-fold increase in sound level. A tractor, a petrol strimmer and a power drill are each likely to generate at least 90dB. A chainsaw is likely to be well over 100dB.
4.0 What The Action Values Mean

The action to be taken will depend on the noise levels in the workplace and whether or not they meet or exceed the action values as defined earlier and again below.

4.1 Lower Exposure Action Values

The lower exposure action values are:

i. a daily or weekly personal noise exposure of 80dB (A weighted); and

ii. a peak sound pressure of 135dB (C weighted).

If these levels are reached, staff must be:

a) informed of the level of exposure;
   b) informed of the associated risks;
   c) instructed in how to minimise the risks;
   d) be provided with hearing protection.

4.2 Upper Exposure Action Values

The upper exposure action values are:

i. a daily or weekly personal noise exposure of 85dB (A weighted); and

ii. a peak sound pressure of 137dB (C weighted).

If these levels are reached:

a) hearing protection must be provided to ensure that the daily noise dose is reduced to below 85dB and the employee must use it;

b) the area must be designated a hearing protection zone and staff exposed provided with annual hearing surveillance.
5.0 The Health Effects Of Noise At Work

Noise at work can cause hearing loss which can be temporary or permanent. People often experience temporary deafness after leaving a noisy place. Although hearing recovers within a few hours, this should not be ignored. It is a sign that if you continue to be exposed to the noise your hearing could be permanently damaged. Permanent hearing damage can be caused immediately by sudden, extremely loud, explosive noises, e.g. from guns or cartridge operated machines.

But hearing loss is usually gradual because of prolonged exposure to noise. It may only be when damage caused by noise over the years combines with hearing loss caused by ageing that people realize how deaf they have become. Hearing loss is not the only problem. People may develop tinnitus (ringing, whistling, buzzing or humming in the ears), a distressing condition which can lead to disturbed sleep and the negative consequences of this.

Noise can also be a safety hazard at work, interfering with communication and making it difficult to hear warnings.

6.0 Reducing Noise Exposure

Measures should be put in place to reduce risks from noise exposure to as low a level as is reasonably practicable – even if noise levels are below the lower exposure action value, consideration should be given as to whether further reduction is practical.

Wherever noise levels may exceed the lower exposure action level (e.g. personal exposure exceeding 80 dB) assistance should be sought from the Councils' Health and Safety Team to assist with risk assessment and noise reduction.

Formal measures to reduce noise exposure must be introduced if the upper exposure action value is exceeded i.e. personal exposure above 85dB.
Personal noise exposure MUST NOT exceed the exposure limit value of 87dB (this measurement can take into account the effect of hearing protection).

Measures to reduce noise exposure may include:-

a) replacing tools and equipment with alternatives which create lower levels of noise
b) ensuring all equipment is properly maintained
c) Reducing exposure by reducing time exposed to noise
d) Shielding or enclosure (of either a piece of equipment or the operator).

Detailed guidance on ways of reducing noise at work can be found in ‘Controlling Noise at Work – Guidance on the Regulations’. An electronic copy is available from the Health and Safety Team or the HSE website.

7.0 Hearing Protection

Hearing protection can be used as an additional measure once noise has been reduced as far as is reasonably practicable by other means; or as an interim measure pending noise reduction. It must not be considered as the sole method of protection.

Hearing protection should be made available on request if noise exceeds the lower action value (80dB).

Any workplace where noise levels exceed 85dB(A) (or a peak sound level of 137dB(C)) must be designated as ‘Hearing Protection Zones’ and marked with appropriate signage. Within these areas, wearing of hearing protection will be compulsory, even though exposure may only be for short periods of time.
Hearing protection provided must be suitable for the levels and type of noise individuals are exposed to. It should also be compatible with any other PPE which is required to be worn at the same time, for example eye or head protection. Guidance on choosing suitable hearing protection can be found in “Controlling Noise at work – Guidance on Regulations” an electronic copy of which is available via the Health & Safety Team.
8.0  Roles & Responsibilities

8.1  Councillors

Under this policy, Councillors are responsible for:

8.1.1 Making sure this policy is adopted and implemented so that the Council can comply with the Noise at Work Regulations.

8.1.2 Ensuring that any noise related safety issues brought before them receive appropriate attention.

8.1.3 Ensuring that sufficient resources are identified and made available for the effective implementation of this policy.

8.2  Chief Executive

The Chief Executive is responsible for:

8.2.1 Ensuring sufficient arrangements exist and are put in place for the effective implementation of this policy.

8.2.2 Ensuring in particular that the necessary resources are properly allocated for putting the policy into practice.
8.3 Directors & Heads of Service

Directors, Heads of Service and other senior managers are responsible for the implementation of this policy throughout their respective directorates and departments.

In particular, Directors and Heads of Service are responsible for:

8.3.1 Understanding the main requirements of the Noise at Work Regulations as explained in this policy.

8.3.2 Understanding the requirements of this policy.

8.3.3 Ensuring that provision is made for the introduction of noise control measures as identified by risk assessment.

8.4 Managers, Supervisors, Chargehands, Team Leaders etc.

This section of the policy applies to the Council’s first tier of management, regardless of what the job titles within that tier may be. It applies to anyone who sets or oversees the work of others.

Managers, Supervisors, Team Leaders etc. are therefore expected to:

8.4.1 Review all work activities and areas under their control in order to identify any potentially hazardous noise exposure.

8.4.2 If potentially hazardous noise exposures exist, ensure that risk assessments identify this and that any necessary control measures are identified and put in place.

8.4.3 Ensure that a suitable noise assessment is carried out by a competent person if they suspect the daily exposure reaches the lower action value.
8.4.4 Ensure that the legal limits on noise exposure are not exceeded.

8.4.5 Ensure that staff groups and individuals identified as being at risk are given appropriate information, instruction and training.

8.4.6 Monitor the effectiveness of risk control measures relating to noise at work through an effective system of reporting, investigating and recording of incidents.

8.4.7 Ensure that identified staff are referred to the Occupational Health Service for health surveillance appointments.

8.4.8 Liaise with the Occupational Health Service and implement any measures for individuals based on their advice.

8.4.9 Consider the impact new equipment may have on noise levels in the workplace before purchase or hire.

8.4.10 Ensure that staff are consulted on matters relating to noise levels and their hearing.

8.4.11 Ensure that all staff are aware of this policy and understand its content, as well as the working details of local procedures and arrangements.

8.5 All Employees

All employees have a legal duty to:

8.5.1 Report any problems / incidents with regard to noise levels in the workplace.

8.5.2 Co-operate with the undertaking of any workplace noise monitoring.

8.5.3 Attend any Occupational Health appointments where this is deemed necessary, for example, as part of a health surveillance programme.
8.5.4 Correctly wear any hearing protection provided by management and to look after it and store it correctly to make sure it remains fit for purpose.

8.5.5 Not interfere with or misuse personal hearing protection equipment.

8.5.6 Take care of themselves and others, making sure their activities do not create any unnecessary risks.

8.5.7 Inform their Manager or Supervisor of anything they think anything is unsafe or if they think any noise control measure is not working properly.

8.6 **Occupational Health Team**

The Council’s Occupational Health team will:

8.6.1 Operate a hearing surveillance programme for all staff who are at risk of hearing damage.

8.6.2 Provide Management with information on any hearing loss amongst their staff.

8.6.3 Provide information for line managers on control measures required for individuals.

8.7 **Health & Safety Team**

The Council’s Health and Safety team will:

8.7.1 Advise and assist with the risk assessment process.

8.7.2 Where necessary, carry out noise surveys to measure workplace sound levels and to provide management and the Occupational Health Team with information on noise exposure levels.

8.7.3 Advise on the selection of suitable hearing protection equipment.
9.0 Noise Risk Assessment Process

A noise risk assessment is an identification of where there is a risk from noise exposure and who is likely to be harmed by that noise.

It will include a reliable estimate of the employee’s exposure (based on measurements taken in the workplace or data from suppliers of machinery and equipment). It will also identify what is required to comply with the law, e.g. whether noise control measures or hearing protection is required and it should identify those staff who need to be provided with health surveillance.

The risk assessment should also take into account:

- the work being undertaken or likely to be undertaken by staff;
- the way in which the work is carried out;
- whether there are any noise variations from day to day.

There are five stages to assessing the risks from noise exposure. They closely follow the usual five steps to risk assessment.

**STAGE 1:** Is there a risk from noise exposure?

**STAGE 2:** Who might be harmed and how?

- e.g. operators and staff nearby
- visitors, contractors etc. within the noisy area
- staff with a pre-existing hearing condition
- pregnant women and young people
STAGE 3: Evaluate the risks and make plans to control them

- assess how long the employee is regularly exposed to noise in the workplace
- assess the average noise levels the employee is exposed to during the working day - do this via published information on noise levels, information from the equipment manufacturer/supplier, or by a noise measurement carried out by a competent person (please contact the Council’s Health & Safety Team for details).
- where noise hazards and risks are found to exist, an action plan for controlling the exposure must be produced. Control measures may include:
  - changing the way of working
  - replacing what is causing the noise with something less noisy
  - relocation of noisy equipment and processes
  - acoustic barriers/enclosures and damping
  - redesign working patterns/task rotation to minimise duration of exposure
  - provision of information, instruction and training
  - selecting equipment with low noise emissions
  - the use of personal protective equipment, e.g. ear defenders/muffs, ear plugs

STAGE 4: Record the findings

Record the:

- workplace or area assessed, the tasks, and the people included in the assessment
- date the assessment was made
- noise exposure levels experienced by the staff
- what PPE (if any) is currently in use
STAGE 5: Review the risk assessment

The risk assessment should be reviewed:

- where there is reason to suspect that it does not reflect the current noise risk
- when improved methods of controlling noise exposure become available
- when health surveillance shows that employee's hearing may be damaged
- annually if nothing has changed.

10.0 Information Instruction & Training

All staff should be aware of the risks they may be exposed to at work and of what is being done about it. In other words, the main findings of risk assessments and noise surveys should be shared with those staff who are at risk of hearing damage.

In particular, once the lower action value is reached, staff should be informed of:

a) the likely noise exposure and the risk to their hearing this creates;
b) what control measures are in place;
c) where to obtain hearing protection and how to report defects in this equipment;
d) what they should do to minimise risk, including the wearing of PPE and safe working practices, e.g. following a job rotation pattern so they spend less time exposed to noise;
e) the details of the Council's hearing surveillance programme;
f) how to detect the first signs of hearing damage.
All staff required to use hearing protection must be trained in the correct use of it, how to look for defects and informed where they may obtain it. This is not specialist training; it can be delivered by the first tier of management.

11.0 Health / Hearing Surveillance Programme

11.1 Health surveillance in the form of hearing checks will be provided by the Council’s Occupational Health Team for all staff who are likely to be regularly exposed to noise levels above the upper action value. This will be determined by risk assessment and noise monitoring. Hearing surveillance will also be provided for staff who are at risk for any other reason, e.g. those with a pre-existing hearing condition.

11.2 The purpose of health surveillance is to spot any early signs of hearing damage so that control measures can be reviewed and the general situation monitored.

11.3 Health surveillance will also be carried out for new starters or those changing jobs before staff are exposed to noise (where the job has been identified as one requiring health surveillance). This will provide management and Occupational Health staff with a baseline assessment.

11.4 All individual records will be held in confidence. Where appropriate, summary results for groups of employees will be reported back to a manager to indicate the effectiveness of noise management systems.