How to deal with noise at work

For small businesses
Do I need to read this?

Does your work involve using:
  • noisy machines or equipment?
  • tools that make loud, explosive noises – eg powder-actuated tools?

Do you want some influence over your ACC work levies?

If you’ve answered ‘yes’ to either of these questions, you should read this booklet.
If sounds and noises are too loud, they can permanently damage your hearing. The danger depends on how loud the noise is and how long you’re exposed to it. The damage builds up gradually and you may not notice changes from one day to another but for most effects of noise there is no cure.

So preventing excessive exposure to noise is the only way to avoid hearing loss.

This booklet will help you to find out if noise is harming you or your workers and help you to deal with it. In a New Zealand workplace exposure to noise must not exceed 85dB(A) in an eight-hour period.

Sudden loud noise or exposure to noise over time will damage your hearing!

Why should you do something about it?

• Fewer injuries mean lower cost to your business and this becomes more apparent with the introduction of experience rating. Under experience rating, eligible businesses and self-employed people, who have lower-than-average injury rates, with better-than-average return-to-work rates, may get a discount on their levies. Those with worse-than-average claims experience may get a loading on their levy.

Experience rating recognises and rewards those business owners with good claims experience. It also encourages businesses to prevent injuries in the workplace and when accidents do happen, help injured employees return to work as safely and quickly as possible.

For more detailed information about experience rating please go to www.acc.co.nz/er.

• You and your workers may be at risk of suffering permanently reduced hearing, or even deafness, from being exposed to noise at work.

• Some people develop a permanent ringing noise in their ears (tinnitus) after being exposed to noise. This is very distressing and can lead to sleeping problems.

• People with hearing loss may have difficulty hearing warnings or alarms. They may also have problems understanding verbal instructions they are given. This can become a serious safety issue in your workplace.
What should you do now?

Get everyone in your workplace to answer these four questions:

1. At work, do you have to shout to make yourself heard by someone about an arm’s length away?
   - Yes  ○ No

2. Do you get ringing or buzzing in your ears after work or after doing certain jobs?
   - Yes  ○ No

3. Do you have to turn up the sound on the TV or radio after a day at work?
   - Yes  ○ No

4. Do you often have to ask people to repeat things they’ve just said?
   - Yes  ○ No

If you or your workers answered **Yes** to any of these questions, your work may be damaging your hearing.

You will need to:

1. Arrange to have hearing tests done if you or your workers answered ‘yes’ to any of the questions above.

2. Talk to your workers and identify all of the noisy situations in which you are working.

3. Go through the checklist in this booklet and make changes to reduce the noise.

4. Give your workers the proper earmuffs or earplugs for the job. Make sure they know how to use them properly and check that your workers are wearing them. Put up signs in entrance ways reminding everyone of the need to wear hearing protection.

5. Get help to deal with any noisy situations you can’t control. Check the list at the back of this booklet for where to get further advice.
# Noise control checklist

If you answer ‘yes’ to any questions on the checklist, you need to follow the ‘Action required’ and indicate the date you completed it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Action required</th>
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<tr>
<td>Have you or your workers answered ‘yes’ to any of the questions on page 2?</td>
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<td>Look at the jobs you’re doing to see if you can make them less noisy:</td>
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<td>• arrange for a hearing test to be done – check under audiologists in the Yellow Pages for contact details</td>
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<td>• make sure everyone has appropriate earmuffs or earplugs and knows how to use them properly.</td>
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<td>Does your work involve using noisy machines or equipment?</td>
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<td>• Try to quieten the source of the noise:</td>
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<td>– big noise reductions can be made by designing equipment and work processes so they are not as noisy, for example by lining metal chutes and bins with scrap rubber conveyor belting</td>
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<td>– install vibration isolators if possible</td>
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<td>– keep machines and equipment well maintained to reduce noise.</td>
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<td>• Stop the noise from reaching people. This can be done by:</td>
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<td>– moving a noisy machine away from people</td>
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<td>– building a soundproof enclosure around a noisy machine</td>
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<td>– putting up a barrier between machines and operators.</td>
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<td>• Reduce the time people are exposed to the noise:</td>
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<td>– where possible, people should swap between noisy and quiet jobs so that nobody gets exposed to noise for too long.</td>
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<td>• Make sure hearing protection is used when necessary:</td>
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<td>– if noise exposure is still excessive after all possible control measures have been taken, individual protection, such as earmuffs or earplugs must be worn.</td>
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<td>Date completed</td>
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Where can you get further information or help?

**Publications**

The following are some of the publications available from the Department of Labour:

- Approved Code of Practice for Management of Noise in the Workplace.
- Resource Kit – Management of Noise and Work.
- Selection and Use of Hearing Protectors.

**Contact ACC Injury Prevention**

- To contact the ACC Injury Prevention team, phone 0800 844 657 or email thinksafe@acc.co.nz
- For further injury prevention information, go to the ACC website www.acc.co.nz/nihl

**Contact the Department Of Labour – Health And Safety**

- For publications or advice, phone the Workplace Health and Safety Infoline, freephone 0800 20 90 20.
- To get help with difficult or technical health and safety problems, use the online knowledgebase at: www.dol.govt.nz/workplace/knowledgebase/contact

**For hearing testing**

Refer to ‘Hearing Aids, Equipment & Services’ in the Yellow Pages for contacts in your area.