

TOOLBOX TALK

Noise toolbox talk

About six minutes · Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005

SITE

DATE

GIVEN BY

WHY IT MATTERS

About 15,000 workers in Great Britain have hearing problems caused or made worse by their work. That is the HSE estimate from its own survey of working people, and it is harm that nobody notices on the day it happens. Noise does not leave a mark. It takes a little hearing each shift, and by the time conversation is hard to follow in a busy room, the damage is done and it is permanent.

Some people get tinnitus as well: a ringing or buzzing in the ears that does not stop, even at night. There is no treatment that gives hearing back once noise has taken it. Hearing aids help, but they do not repair the ear. This talk is about keeping the hearing you have.

HSE, Noise induced hearing loss in Great Britain (Labour Force Survey estimate, 2022/23 to 2024/25)

THE POINTS TO MAKE

☐ **Hearing loss is permanent and gradual**

The ear does not heal the way skin does. Loud noise damages the fine cells inside it, and once they are gone they are gone. It happens a little at a time, so nobody feels it on the day. A ringing or muffled feeling after a noisy job is a warning that harm has been done, not a sign that your ears are getting used to it.

☐ **The levels the law works to**

The law measures your noise dose over a day. At an average of 80 dB(A) the employer assesses the risk, tells you about it and provides hearing protection if you ask. At 85 dB(A) protection must be provided and worn, and the area becomes a hearing protection zone. For single loud bangs, the peak values are 135 and 137 dB(C). A cartridge tool or a hammer on steel can reach those in one hit.

☐ **Distance and time**

Noise falls away quickly with distance. Moving a generator or compressor away from where people are working, putting a screen or a wall between the noise and the team, and keeping people who do not need to be near the job out of the area all cut the dose. So does sharing a noisy task between two people and taking breaks away from it.

☐ **Protection that fits, not the heaviest**

Ear defenders and plugs only work when they seal. Plugs need rolling and inserting properly, defenders need to sit flat with nothing under the cushion, and a hard hat or glasses can break the seal. Heavier is not better. Protection that cuts too much noise leaves you unable to hear a shout or a reversing alarm, so it comes off. Pick the right grade and wear it for the whole job.

☐ **The two-metre test**

You do not need a meter to spot a noise problem. If you have to raise your voice to have a normal conversation with someone about two metres away, the noise is around the level where the law starts to act. If you use a noisy powered tool for more than half an hour a day, the same applies. Breakers, cutters and grinders are well past that.

☐ **Quieter tools and methods first**

Hearing protection is the last line, not the first. Before that comes the job itself: can it be done a quieter way, such as a breaker with a silenced body, a cutter with a damped blade, a crusher instead of a hammer, or a hired machine chosen for its noise figure? Worn bearings, loose panels and blunt blades all add noise, so report kit that has got louder.

☐ **Hearing protection zones**

Where noise reaches the upper action value, the area is a hearing protection zone. It is marked with the blue ear defender sign, and everyone who goes in wears protection for the whole time they are inside, including visitors, delivery drivers and the person who only popped in to ask a question. If a zone is not marked and you think it should be, say so.

☐ **Hearing checks**

If you are regularly exposed above the upper action value, you get a hearing check, usually every year for the first two years and then every three years, and you need to turn up for it. The test picks up early damage before you notice it yourself, and the result is yours. It is a check on whether the controls are working, not a test anybody fails.

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TOOLBOX TALK, CONTINUED

Noise toolbox talk: do, do not, and the questions

DO

- Use the quietest tool and method that will do the job, and report kit that has got louder.
- Keep generators, compressors and cutting stations away from where people are working.
- Wear hearing protection for the whole of a noisy task, in every marked zone, every time.
- Fit plugs and defenders properly and check the seal, especially with a hard hat and glasses.
- Share noisy tasks and take breaks away from the noise.
- Go to your hearing check when it is booked, and tell us if your ears ring after work.

DO NOT

- Do not treat ringing or muffled hearing after a shift as normal. It is damage.
- Do not take protection off for a quick word inside a hearing protection zone. Step outside instead.
- Do not run a noisy tool next to someone who is not wearing protection.
- Do not use ear defenders that are cracked, have hard cushions or no longer sit flat.
- Do not choose protection so heavy that you cannot hear alarms, horns or a shout.
- Do not wear music earphones as hearing protection. They add noise rather than cutting it.

ASK THE TEAM

- ? Where on this site today would you have to raise your voice to be heard two metres away?
- ? Which tools and plant on this job are the loudest, and is there a quieter way to do that task?
- ? Where are the hearing protection zones, and how do we know where they start?
- ? Does your protection seal with your hard hat and glasses on? Show me.
- ? When was your last hearing test, and do you know what it showed?

TO CLOSE

Nobody chooses to lose their hearing. It goes a little at a time, on jobs that felt normal, with protection that was in a pocket or did not quite seal. Your hearing has to last you long after this job is finished. If the noise is loud enough that you are raising your voice, it is loud enough to do harm. Choose the quieter way, keep your distance, wear protection that fits for the whole job, and tell us when something gets louder. We will sort it.

Record it. Who gave the talk, where, when, who was there and what was raised. The last page is the record.

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ATTENDANCE RECORD

Noise toolbox talk: given and understood

Each person signs on the day to say they were present and understood the talk. Anyone who joins the team later is given the talk before starting, and signs here.

SITE	DATE	TIME	GIVEN BY
NAME	COMPANY	TRADE OR ROLE	SIGNATURE

QUESTIONS RAISED, AND THE ANSWERS GIVEN	ACTIONS AGREED, WHO AND BY WHEN	
TALK GIVEN BY (SIGNATURE)	POSITION	DATE