

B. PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

B2. HEARING CONSERVATION

1.0 Scope

This Standard applies only to noise exposures in the workplace. It covers noise hazard evaluation, control programme design and control programme evaluation (audiometric surveillance), to ensure that employees and contractors will not suffer adverse health effects from noise generated by the Business.

2.0 Programme Design

2.1 Where risk assessment indicates the need, a hearing conservation programme must be in place such that:

- (a) It complies with all relevant requirements in the A Standards;
- (b) Workplace noise exposures are adequately described;
- (c) Noise sources that contribute to the exceedance of OELs are identified and adequately characterised; and
- (d) Control measures are in place to minimise noise levels and protect employees and contractors from adverse exposure.

2.2 Where it is likely that the 95 percentile value of an 8-hour Leq mean exceeds 85 dB(A), or impulse noise exceeds 140 dB(C), the area must be identified and mapped, signposted or otherwise clearly communicated to employees working in the area. Signposting, where necessary, must use appropriate wording or symbols on signs to identify the hazard.

2.3 These designated areas require a documented hearing conservation programme, regular monitoring of SEGs working in the area and a formal review of the practicality of engineering controls.

2.4 Monitoring must be based on the use of a sound level meter (SLM) approved by local regulatory authorities, with 3 dB exchange rate, and A-weighting and impulse noise measurement capability, as per documented methods.

2.5 Employees and Category 1 contractors whose potential Leq exceeds 85 dB(A), or impulse noise exposure exceeds 140 dB(C), must be encouraged to undergo audiometry. The results should be discussed with the worker.

3.0 Audiometry Programme

3.1 Where an audiometry programme is indicated, it must meet the following standards:

- (a) All testing must be by pure tone audiometry in an audiometry booth or quiet room, with measured noise levels less than 40 dB(A);

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- (b) The initial audiogram must be taken prior to exposure to significant workplace noise. Further audiograms must be taken periodically; annually where exposures are over 85 dB(A) Leq or where continued deterioration to hearing is occurring;
- (c) Testing must be by trained personnel;
- (d) Audiometers must be calibrated according to the manufacturer's guidelines. As a minimum these will be a weekly biological calibration using a member of staff and an annual quantitative check. All results must be documented;
- (e) Audiograms must be read by trained persons who will identify any increasing hearing loss and then determine if this is noise induced. Any employee whose hearing deteriorates by 15dB or more from baseline at 3, 4 or 6 KHz must be retested following removal from noise for a minimum of 48 hours, usually after a days-off period. If the downward shift persists the employee must be reviewed by a physician; and
- (f) All results must be kept in medical confidence. Efforts should be made to persuade any worker with a progressing loss to allow this fact to be communicated to the relevant manager, such that duty of care obligations are fulfilled.

4.0 Exposure Controls

- 4.1 Elimination or substitution must be considered.
- 4.2 Where required or practicable, there must be engineering controls in place.
- 4.3 There must be documented procedures for inspection, assessment and maintenance of the engineering controls and noisy equipment to ensure that the equipment continues to operate to design specifications.
- 4.4 Where required, there must be a documented hearing protection device (HPD) programme based on suitable standards, that provides training in the recognition of signs and symptoms of hazardous noise exposure, emergency procedures and preventative measures.
- 4.5 HPDs must be selected with regard to the potential type and loudness of noise likely, comfort and compatibility with the work tasks.