

Stay safe: noise levels at work

By safely disposing of your liquid waste, you are helping to protect the natural environment. But it's important to protect yourself and others too.

Noise at work can result in temporary or permanent damage to your hearing. It can also cause a safety risk as it can affect how you communicate with others and your ability to hear warning signals.

Around 17,000 people in the UK¹ suffer deafness, ringing in the ears or other ear conditions caused by excessive noise at work. Damage to hearing can be caused by either long-term noise exposure which can gradually increase over time; or as a result of extremely loud noises which can affect hearing instantly.

Work-related noise can also result in a condition called tinnitus. Sufferers experience ringing, buzzing or humming in the ears. This is a distressing condition which can affect concentration and sleep.

By removing or reducing the exposure to noise, hearing loss is easily preventable.

How to spot noise problems in the workplace:

- Do you have to raise your voice to carry out a conversation with someone two metres away?
- Do you work in an environment with noisy plant or equipment for more than 30 minutes every day?
- Are you exposed to loud sudden noises?
- Do you hear ringing or humming in your ears when leaving work?

1. www.hse.gov.uk

Ways to control exposure to noise:

- Use quieter equipment and/or adopt a quieter work process
- Engineer a technical solution to reduce noise levels
- Reduce the sound at source by using screens, sound barriers, silencers or absorbers
- Position noisy machines far from work areas if possible
- Restrict access to noisy areas, rotate tasks and ensure adequate rest breaks
- Carry out regular maintenance of tools and equipment
- Wear appropriate hearing protection.

The responsibility of employers:

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 requires employers to eliminate or reduce the risks to health and safety from noise at work. Ways to achieve this include:

- Assess the risks to employees from noise
- Take action to reduce noise exposure in line with the level of risk
- Provide employees with personal hearing protection
- Ensure the legal limits on noise exposure are not exceeded
- Maintain and ensure the use of appropriate equipment to control noise risks
- Provide employees with information, instruction and training
- Carry out health checks to monitor employees hearing.

It's important to contact your doctor if you spot signs of hearing loss. Early signs can help to identify the problem quickly and prevent long-term or permanent damage.

