

Did you know?

Noise

What are the hazards and risk with noise?

Construction is a noisy business. Noise at high levels can result in damage to the inner part of your ears, which reduces your ability to hear. Noise induced hearing loss (NIHL) is one of the most common occupational health hazards and causes permanent damage.

Noise is measured in decibels. Normal conversation is 50-60 decibels; a loud radio is 65-70 decibels; a busy street is 78-85 decibels; an electric drill is 95-100 decibels; a hammer on nails is 115-120 decibels; a power drill is 125-130 decibels.

When are you most at risk of damaging your hearing?

- *If you are standing about two metres away from someone and you have to shout to be heard then the noise level is high and you should wear hearing protection*
- *If you are carrying out noisy tasks such as drilling*

You do not have to be using noisy equipment to be affected by it, just be nearby. One of the major problems with hearing loss is that it gradually occurs over time, so you may not be aware of it happening.

What should my employer be doing?

[The Control of Noise at Work Regulations \(2005\)](#) – also known as the Noise Regulations – were introduced in April 2006. The aim of these regulations is to make sure that workers' hearing is protected from a level of noise that could damage hearing and/or lead to tinnitus (permanent ringing in the ears).

You can find out more about [noise at work and controlling the risks](#) on the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) website at: www.hse.gov.uk/noise/regulations.htm.

Your employer must assess and identify ways to get rid of or reduce your exposure to noise to protect you and your health, and then make sure that:

- *Control measures to reduce noise are used properly, for example*
 - *Using quieter equipment or a quieter process*
 - *Fitting mufflers to tools where applicable*
 - *Moving noisy machines away from where you are working*
 - *Shielding noise sources, by using screens or noise absorbent materials to form a barrier*

- *You are provided with relevant information and training on noise and its risks to your health*
- *If necessary, health surveillance is carried out*

What health checks should I have?

When you go for a hearing test the occupational health professional will have a look in your ears to see if there are any problems, for example a build up of wax, which may affect the results of your hearing test. You will then have a hearing (audiometry) test. You will be asked to wear a set of headphones and the machine that the headphones are connected to, will play some sounds. When you hear the sounds you will be asked to push a button to show that you have heard something.

What can I do to protect my hearing?

Try to reduce the noise levels in the workplace; for example you could:

- *Select quieter tools*
- *Turn off unused machinery*
- *Keep compressor covers closed*
- *Wear protection correctly*
- *Take note of noise hazard warning signs*
- *Get your hearing tested regularly*

What are the symptoms and what do I need to do?

The only way to tell if you have damaged your hearing is to have a hearing test. However, being able to identify any signs of hearing loss at an early stage is important. Spotting these early signs and making some adjustments can prevent the condition from getting any worse. There are a number of things which may act as early warning signs that you have a problem, including:

- *Tinnitus (ringing in your ears)*
- *Having trouble understanding what people say, especially in crowded rooms*
- *Needing to turn the sound up on your TV or radio*
- *Having to ask people to repeat what they just said to you Not being able to hear high-pitched sounds, like a baby crying or a telephone ringing in another room*
- *It may be that you find it harder to hear some sounds such as 'p' and 'b'*
- *You may find that someone calls your name and you look one way but find that they are standing the other side of you, as it becomes difficult to work out which direction noises are coming from*
- *You may also find that you can't hear what someone is saying unless they are looking directly at you. We all lip read to some extent but generally we use the noises that we hear to back things up*

Sometimes your hearing can be affected by a loud noise, resulting in temporary hearing problems. For example, you may need to turn the radio up when you get in your car after work, but you find that you are turning it down again the following morning.

If your employer provides you with hearing protection, it's important to use it. Once you have hearing loss, it's not possible to get it back.

If you think you may have hearing loss, it's important to speak to your manager or the occupational health nurse or doctor as soon as possible.

For general advice you can contact CBH on 0845 873 7726

Useful links

HSE website at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/>

www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthtopics/dermatitis.htm

CBH website at: www.cbhscheme.com

Fit for Work website at: fitforwork.org