

Noise at Work Policy

Corporate Health and Safety Team

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Version	Author	Date
1	Antony Whittle	May 2025

Document History

Name of Policy	H&SP13 - Noise at Work Policy
Purpose of Policy	<p>New Forest District Council (NFDC) aims to minimise the incidence of workplace risk by providing and maintaining a safe and healthy workplace.</p> <p>Prolonged exposure to noise at work can cause hearing loss, which is often permanent. Hearing loss caused by work is preventable, but once someone’s hearing has gone, it will not come back.</p> <p>To comply with legislation, NFDC will implement risk assessments to work activities to identify noise problems and make suitable and sufficient arrangements to minimise or eliminate the risks of noise to employees at work.</p>
Policy Applies to	This policy and subsequent arrangements apply to all New Forest District Council employees, contractors, agency workers and members of public.
Update Frequency	Every 2 years or sooner if required due to organisational or regulatory changes.
Latest Update	October 2013
Update Overview	<p>First issue February 2005</p> <p>May 2025</p> <p>Complete update of policy document to include roles and responsibilities, guidance and appendices.</p>

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1. Legislative and Regulatory Context

1.1 The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 is the primary piece of legislation covering occupational health and safety in Great Britain. This piece of legislation sets out the general duties which employers have towards employees and members of the public, employees have to themselves and to each other and certain self-employed have towards themselves and others. New Forest District Council acknowledges and accepts its responsibilities under The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and will ensure to control all risks to its employees, contractors and those who may be affected by its arrangements are controlled as low as is reasonably practicable.

1.2 Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 is a piece of legislation covering the management of occupational health and safety in the workplace in Great Britain. This piece of legislation sets out the general duties which employers have relating to the expectations to risk assess, implement arrangements for planning, control, monitoring, and use of preventative and protective measures, provide instruction and training and consultation. NFDC acknowledges and accepts its responsibilities under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and will ensure to implement all the necessary controls and management methods to minimise the risks to its employees.

1.3 Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 (the Noise Regulations) came into force for all industry sectors in Great Britain on 6th April 2006. The aim of the Noise Regulations is to ensure that workers' hearing is protected from excessive noise at their place of work, which could cause them to lose their hearing and/or to suffer from tinnitus (permanent ringing in the ears). NFDC acknowledges and accepts its responsibilities under these regulations and will, so far as is reasonably practicable, implement all necessary controls to minimise or eliminate the risks of noise to its employees and those affected by its undertakings.

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2. Background

Employers are required to safeguard both their own employees and other workers or individuals not employed by them who are exposed to noise from their activities.

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 require the employer to take specific action at certain action levels. These action levels relate to:

- Levels of exposure to noise of employees averaged over a working day (8 hours) or working week
- The maximum noise (peak sound pressure) to which employees are exposed in a working day

The action values are:

- Lower Action Value
 - Daily or weekly exposure of 80dB
 - Peak sound pressure of 135dB
- Upper Action Value
 - Daily or weekly exposure of 85dB
 - Peak sound pressure of 137dB

There are also levels of noise exposure which **must not** be exceeded:

- Exposure Limit Value
 - Daily or weekly exposure of 87dB
 - Peak sound pressure of 140dB

Daily personal noise exposure is the total exposure over the whole working day, considering the varying noise levels in the working environment and how long a person is exposed to them. Peak sound pressure level is linked with cartridge operated tools, shooting guns and similar loud explosive noises where workers are subject to a small number of loud impulses during an otherwise quiet day.

A rough guide to the amount of time an employee should be exposed to a dB(A) value before action needs to be taken to provide ear defenders is as the indicator chart below:

Indicator for dB(A) level and max daily exposure times

dB(A) measurement	Daily exposure time
80dB(A)	8 hours
83dB(A)	4 hours
86dB(A)	2 hours
89dB(A)	1 hour
92dB(A)	30 minutes
95dB(A)	15 minutes
98dB(A)	7 minutes 30 seconds
101dB(A)	3 minutes 45 seconds

There are certain action levels defined within the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005, which relate to the values above.

When the exposure level falls between the lower and upper exposure action values, employees should be given hearing protection if they ask for it.

When the exposure exceeds the upper exposure action values the employee must be given hearing protection and the employer must ensure that it is worn at all times while the noise exposure exists.

When the exposure level is greater than the exposure limit values then action must be taken to reduce the noise created by a process. It is not enough merely to supply hearing protection.

Irrespective of the action levels above, every employer is required to reduce the risk of damage to the hearing of employees from exposure to noise to the lowest level reasonably practicable.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 Service/Senior Managers Must:

- Understand the scope and content of the Noise Regulations where this is relevant to work in their area.
- Provide adequate resources to ensure suitable and sufficient control measures can be implemented within their service area.

3.2 Supervisors/Line Managers Must:

- Understand the scope and content of the Noise Regulations where this is relevant to work in their area.
- Ensure noise factors are considered when hiring or purchasing new work equipment.
- Ensure that necessary noise risk assessments have been undertaken for any equipment used by those in their charge.
- Ensure the hazard of noise at work is included and considered for all generic and task specific risk assessments.
- Implement and enforce noise control measures in conjunction with the Corporate H&S team
- Ensure employees are suitably trained in all aspects of operating equipment, including noise control.
- Ensure, where required, employees are provided with health surveillance.
- Ensure all records relating to noise at work are held in line with the council retention record policy.

3.3 Employees Must:

- Use all equipment and noise control measures in accordance with instruction, risk assessment and method statements.
- Wear hearing protection (PPE) where required.
- Maintain hearing protection and any other noise control equipment.
- Report any defects or difficulties with hearing protection and any other noise control equipment.
- Co-operate with any programme of health surveillance which is identified as necessary following risk assessment.
- Attend mandatory training, including toolbox talks.

3.4 Corporate H&S Team Must:

- Provide competent advice and guidance to all services
- Carry out sound level measurements where appropriate.
- Advise on noise control measures.
- Advise whether health surveillance is appropriate.
- Audit compliance with this policy and the underpinning regulations.

3.5 Occupational Health Must:

- Provide health surveillance on request.
- Give feedback and guidance on risk to individuals following health surveillance.
- Feedback results from health surveillance to the appropriate manager.
- Advise the appropriate manager if there are restrictions on an individual's ability to work in a noisy area due to health risks.

4. Procedures

4.1 Risk Assessment

A **noise risk assessment** is required wherever it is likely that exposure will occur at or above the Lower Exposure Action Value.

As a guide to this, the following may be considered: -

- If noise is intrusive but normal conversation is possible, likely noise level is approx. **80dB**
- If you must shout to talk to someone 2m away, likely noise level is approx. **85 dB**
- If you must shout to talk to someone 1m away, likely noise level is **90dB**

The decibel scale used to measure noise is logarithmic. An increase in 3 dB equates to a doubling of sound. The increase from 80 to 85 dB is almost a four-fold increase in sound level.

A formal, documented risk assessment should be carried out if any individual works in an area exceeding 80dB on a regular basis (e.g. 4 hours or more, most days or if noise levels exceed 85dB, even if exposure is infrequent or irregular.

If risk assessment is deemed not to be necessary this must be recorded, for example as part of a service or team's general risk assessment.

Risk assessment requires: -

- Assessment of the level and type of noise; this may come from manufacturer's data for individual pieces of equipment, or from sound level measurement, especially where multiple pieces of equipment operate in an area simultaneously. Additional noise e.g. from background music should also be included;
- Identification of who might be affected;
- The likely exposure time of those individuals, considering working patterns, noise exposure during breaks etc;
- Assessment of indirect risk e.g. the risk of individuals not hearing warning alarms due to the noise level;
- Consideration of additional risk factors such as the presence of vibration or solvents.
- Consideration of pre-existing noise or hearing related conditions*

** Where a noise or hearing related health condition has been identified, a **person specific risk assessment** must be completed with the employee. The Corporate Health and Safety team can assist with this assessment along with advice and guidance from the council's Occupational Health provider.*

The risk assessment should include an action plan which documents the measures already in place to reduce the risk from noise exposure and any further measures planned.

The noise risk assessment can be a stand-alone document or can be incorporated into the overall risk assessment document for a service, team or process where this is more appropriate.

Noise risk assessments must be reviewed when there has either been a significant change in the work to which the assessment relates or wherever there is reason to suspect that the assessment is no longer valid.

An adequate record of the assessment and/or any review must be kept in line with the councils retention period of 40 years.

4.2 Reducing Noise Exposure

Measures should be put in place to reduce risks from noise exposure to as low a level as reasonably practicable, even if noise levels are below the Lower Exposure Action Value. Consideration should be given as to whether further reductions are practical.

Wherever noise levels may exceed the Lower Exposure Action Level (e.g. personal exposure exceeding 80 dB), assistance should be sought from the Corporate H&S Team to assist with risk assessment and noise reduction.

Formal measures to reduce noise exposure must be introduced if the Upper Exposure Action Value is exceeded, e.g. personal exposure is above 85dB.

Provision of hearing protection is not an adequate solution in these circumstances. PPE is the last resort or should be used in conjunction with other measures such as engineering controls.

Personal noise exposure must not exceed the Exposure Limit Value of 87dB. (This measurement considers the effect of hearing protection (e.g. PPE).

Measures to reduce noise exposure may include:

- Replacing tools and equipment with alternatives which create lower levels of noise.
- Ensuring all equipment is properly maintained.
- Reducing exposure by reducing time exposed to noise.
- Shielding or enclosure (of either a piece of equipment or the operator).

Detailed guidance on ways of reducing noise exposure can be found in; **“Controlling Noise at work: the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005. Guidance on Regulations”**.

4.3 Hearing Protection

Hearing protection can be used as an additional measure once noise has been reduced as far as is reasonably practicable by other means; or as an interim measure pending noise reduction. It must not be used as the sole method of protection if personal noise exposures exceed the upper action value (85dB)

Hearing protection should be made available on request if noise exceeds the lower action value (80dB)

Any area where noise levels exceed 85dB (or peak sound level of 137dBC) must be designated as 'Hearing Protection Zones' and marked with appropriate signage. Within these areas, wearing of hearing protection will be compulsory, even though exposure may only be for short periods of time.

Hearing protection provided must be suitable for the levels and type of noise individuals are exposed to. Guidance on choosing suitable hearing protection can be found in **"Controlling Noise at work: the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005. Guidance on Regulations"**.

Hearing protection should be stored properly, kept well maintained and regularly inspected by a competent person. Pre-use checks must be carried out by the user and any defects reported and defective equipment replaced before starting or resuming work.

4.4 Health Surveillance

Services must provide health surveillance for those activities which require protection from noise induced hearing loss using the occupational health provision.

The regulations require the council to take certain steps where employees are likely to be exposed to various noise levels either over a full working day or by infrequent but loud impact or explosive noises.

A preliminary decision on whether an assessment is needed can usually be determined without making a detailed noise measurement. The following examples are for guidance:

- An assessment of daily personal exposure will be necessary wherever persons must shout or have difficulty being heard clearly from 2 metres away
- An assessment of loud impact noise should be conducted whenever exposure of such noise may be reasonably expected

Health surveillance (audiometry) must be carried out for employees who are regularly exposed to noise above the upper exposure action value (85dB)

Health surveillance will also be offered to those exposed above the Lower Exposure Action Value if they are at increased risk e.g. if they report a known sensitivity to noise damage or a family history of early deafness.

Where health surveillance is required, it will usually be carried out annually for the first two years then at 3 yearly intervals. Wherever possible, audiometry for new employees (or those newly exposed to noise within their role) should be carried out prior to any noise exposure, ostensibly to give baseline data.

4.5 Information, Instruction and Training

All employees who are exposed to noise above the Lower Exposure Action Value should be given training to include: -

- The adverse effects of noise
- The results of risk assessments
- The measures required to reduce harmful noise exposure
- The need for hearing protection
- The correct use etc of hearing protection
- The need for health surveillance
- The responsibilities on employees

Training must be arranged by the relevant service. Alternatively, the provision of information may be achieved through induction, toolbox talks and E-Learning modules.

Measures must be in place to ensure that new employees receive appropriate training prior to exposure to noise.

5. Relevant Legislation, Guidance and Links

- **Controlling Noise at Work: The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005: Guidance on Regulations; L108**
- **Noise at Work: Advice for Employers; INDG 362**
- **Noise: Don't lose your hearing; INDG 363**
- HSE Noise Calculator(s); **Exposure calculators and ready-reckoners - HSE**
- HSE Noise at Work Website; **Noise at work**
- **H&SP01 – Corporate Health and Safety Policy**
- **H&SP09 – Corporate PPE Policy**
- **Person Centric Risk Assessment Template**
- **Corporate Risk Assessment Templates**

6. Appendix

Appendix 1 – Noise Risk Assessment Template

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