Minimum Standard: Managing Noise and Preventing Hearing Loss at Work

December, 2013

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<th>Executive Director Human Resources</th>
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Minimum Standard: Managing Noise and Preventing Hearing Loss at Work (December, 2013)
Executive Summary

The University has a primary duty under the WHS Act to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that workers and other persons are not exposed to health and safety risks, including:

- ensuring that the noise a worker is exposed to at the workplace does not exceed the exposure standard for noise;
- providing audiometric testing to a worker who is frequently required to use personal hearing protectors in order to protect the worker from hearing loss associated with noise that exceeds the exposure standard.

The objective of this Standard is to provide support to Organisational Unit Heads and advice to workers for managing noise and preventing hearing loss in the workplace.

More Information

For further information, contact the Human Resources – WHS Unit. Email: health.safety@utas.edu.au

Using this Standard

This standard is to be applied in conjunction with the following documents:

- Managing Noise and Preventing Hearing Loss at Work Code of Practice;
- University of Tasmania Health Monitoring Minimum Standard.

The University will comply with the Code, unless compliance can be achieved by following another method, such as a technical or an industry standard, if it provides an equivalent or higher standard of work health and safety than the Code.

This Standard applies to all types of work and at any University workplace where there is the potential for exposure to noise that can contribute to hearing loss.

An exemption for any of the requirements in this Minimum Standard may only be approved by the Work Health and Safety (WHS) Unit, following completion of a risk assessment and consultation with the relevant Organisational Unit Head(s).

Standard Provisions

Managing the risks related to noise will assist in:

- protecting workers from hearing loss and disabling tinnitus (ringing in the ears or head)
- improving the conditions for communication and hearing warning sounds
- creating a less stressful and more productive work environment.

Responsibilities

The Manager/Supervisor of each Organisational Unit is to manage the risks of hearing loss associated with noise by following the systematic process provided in the Code and is to:

- identify sources of noise that may cause or contribute to hearing loss;
• if necessary, assess the risks associated with these hazards;
• implement risk control measures;
• review risk control measures.

6 Consultation

Managers and Supervisors are to consult:

• so far as is reasonably practicable, with workers;
• with Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs)

Managers and Supervisors are to consult, co-operate and co-ordinate activities with all other persons who have a work health or safety duty in relation to the same matter, so far as is reasonably practicable. This may include:

• contractors;
• persons in shared workplaces e.g. Polytechnic.

7 Identify the Hazards

Managers and Supervisors are to identify sources of hazardous noise.

A checklist is provided in Appendix B of the Code to help with this process.

Managers and Supervisors are to:

• inspect the workplace;
• review available information regarding noise levels from:
  o manufacturers or suppliers of plant and equipment used at the workplace;
  o information and advice about hazards and risks relevant to particular industries and work activities;
• check whether any workers’ compensation claims have been made for hearing loss; and
• check if any hearing loss or tinnitus has been found during repeat audiometric testing.

Managers and Supervisors are to:

• in consultation with workers and health and safety representatives, make a list of all noisy activities that may pose a risk to the health and safety of persons at the workplace;
• if unsure about the level of exposure or how to eliminate or minimise the risks effectively, take the next step to assess the risks of hearing loss.

8 Assess the Risks

For any noisy activities that may expose workers or other people at the workplace to hazardous noise, Managers and Supervisors are required to:

• reduce the exposures to below the standard immediately, or if not reasonably practicable;
• assess the risk by carrying out a noise assessment.
Managers and Supervisors are to ensure a noise assessment is carried out:

- by a competent person; and
- in accordance with the Code.

9 Control the Risks

The Manager/Supervisor is responsible for ensuring:

- the risks are eliminated, or if that is not reasonably practicable, the risks are minimised so far as is reasonably practicable.
- the hierarchy of control is worked through to choose the control measure that most effectively eliminates or minimises the risk in the circumstances.

9.1 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

9.1.1 Manager/Supervisor

Where personal protective equipment is to be used at the workplace, the Manager/Supervisor must ensure that the equipment is:

- selected to minimise risk to health and safety;
- suitable for the nature of the work and any hazard associated with the work;
- a suitable size and fit and reasonably comfortable for the person wearing it;
- maintained, repaired or replaced so it continues to minimise the risk;
- used or worn by the worker, so far as is reasonably practicable.

9.1.2 Workers

- worker must, so far as reasonably able, wear the PPE in accordance with any information, training or reasonable instruction.

9.1.3 Sign posting

Managers and Supervisors are to ensure areas where people may be exposed to hazardous noise are sign-posted as hearing protector areas and the boundaries of these areas are clearly defined.

Workers and other persons, including managers and visitors, are not to enter these areas without wearing appropriate personal hearing protectors.

Where sign-posting is not practicable, other arrangements are to be made to ensure that workers and others know when personal hearing protectors are required.

9.1.4 Selection

When selecting personal hearing protectors Managers and Supervisors are to consider:

- the degree of attenuation required in the worker’s environment;
- the suitability for the type of working environment and the work tasks;
- the comfort, weight and clamping force of the personal hearing protector.
9.1.5 Maintenance

Managers and Supervisors are to ensure that:

- personal hearing protectors are regularly inspected and maintained to ensure they remain in good, clean condition;
- workers are provided with training, information and instruction in the proper use, fit, care and maintenance of personal hearing protectors.

9.2 Audiometric testing

The University must provide audiometric testing (in accordance with Regulation 58) for a worker carrying out work for the University and who is required to frequently use personal hearing protectors as a control measure for noise that exceeds the exposure standard.

Audiometric testing is to comply with the University’s Health Monitoring Guidelines.

Managers and Supervisors are to ensure that audiometric testing is provided:

- within three months of the worker commencing work;
- in regular follow-up tests carried out at least every two years;
- more frequently if exposures are at a high LAeq,8h, which is equal or greater than 100 dB(A).

Managers and Supervisors are to ensure:

- they consult with workers and their Health and Safety Representatives before audiometric testing is undertaken;
- audiometric testing and assessment of audiograms are carried out by competent persons;
- workers are given the results of audiometric testing accompanied by a written explanation of the meaning and implications;
- the reasons for any changes in hearing levels over time are thoroughly investigated.

When temporary or permanent threshold shifts are revealed through audiometric assessments or a worker reports a recent diagnosis of tinnitus, the manager/Supervisor must review the control measures to determine whether more effective control measures can be implemented so that workers do not have to rely on personal hearing protectors.

If the worker is to continue using personal hearing protectors, the Manager/Supervisor is to:

- verify that the nominal performance of the worker’s personal hearing protector is adequate for the level of exposure to noise;
- examine the protector carefully and ensure it is not damaged;
- check the protector fits the worker closely with no leakage paths for noise;
- ask the worker if they have any difficulty using the protector;
- check the worker uses the protector correctly and consistently whilst performing their work.
If workers are found to have sufficient hearing loss to interfere with the safe performance of their work, all reasonably practicable steps are to be taken to modify the work environment.

Managers and Supervisors are to ensure that regular audiometric testing is undertaken in situations where workers are exposed to:

- any of the ototoxic substances listed in Appendix A of the Code, where the airborne exposure (without regard to respiratory protection worn) is greater than 50 per cent of the national exposure standard for the substance, regardless of the noise level;
- ototoxic substances at any level and noise with LAeq,8h greater than 80 dB(A) or LC,peak greater than 135 dB(C);
- hand-arm vibration at any level and noise with LAeq,8h greater than 80 dB(A) or LC,peak greater than 135 dB(C).

9.3 Information, training and instruction

The University must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that information, training and instruction is provided to workers and others at the workplace, to protect them from health and safety risks.

The Manager/Supervisor is to ensure that information, training and instruction is, so far as is reasonably practicable, provided in a way that can be easily understood by any person to whom it is provided in accordance with Regulation 39.

Training is to be provided to:

- those workers who may be exposed to hazardous noise or other agents that may contribute to hearing loss;
- their managers and supervisors;
- workplace health and safety committees and Health and Safety Representatives;
- those responsible for the purchase of plant, noise control equipment, personal hearing protectors and for the design, scheduling, organisation and layout of work.

The contents of the training program is to include:

- the health and safety responsibilities of each party at the workplace;
- how hearing can be affected by exposure to noise;
- the detrimental effects hearing loss and tinnitus have on the quality of life, both at work and socially;
- the tasks at the workplace that have the potential to give rise to hearing loss and the likely noise exposure level;
- how to use noise control measures;
- how to select, fit, wear, maintain and store personal hearing protectors;
- how to report defects in hearing protectors and noise control equipment or raise any concerns regarding hazardous noise;
- the purpose and nature of audiometric testing.
9.4 Implementing and maintaining control measures

Managers and Supervisors are responsible for a noise management plan to help implement the chosen noise control measures effectively. The plan is to identify what action needs to be taken, who will be responsible for taking the action and by when.

The plan is to be based on the results of any noise assessment and is to also include:

- measuring noise levels to confirm that control measures are achieving expected attenuation;
- specifications for purchasing or hiring plant;
- a description of any training and supervision that may be needed;
- control measures for temporary work areas and situations;
- time frames for reviewing noise assessments and control measures.

The Manager/Supervisor must ensure that the control measures they implement remain effective in accordance with Regulation 37. This includes checking that the control measures are suitable for the nature and duration of the work, are installed, maintained and used correctly.

10 Review Control Measures

Managers and Supervisors must review, and if necessary revise any noise control measures that are implemented to:

- make sure they work as planned;
- maintain, so far as is reasonably practicable, a work environment that is without risks to health and safety.

The Manager/Supervisor must review and as necessary revise noise control measures:

- when the control measure does not control the risk so far as is reasonably practicable;
- before a change at the workplace that is likely to give rise to a new or different health and safety risk that the control measure may not effectively control;
- if a new hazard or risk is identified;
- if the results of consultation indicate that a review is necessary;
- if a Health and Safety Representative requests a review.

11 Designers, Manufacturers, Suppliers and Installers

Managers and Supervisors are to ensure that a designer of plant for the University:

- designs the plant so that its noise emission is as low as reasonably practicable;
- provides information on the noise emission values of the plant.

Managers and Supervisors are to ensure that a designer of a building or structure for the University:

- takes noise control into account from the beginning of the planning process; and
- minimises the noise transmitted through the structure to the lowest level that is reasonably practicable.
Managers and Supervisors are to ensure that designers, manufacturers, suppliers and importers give the University the information needed to safely use the plant, including the results of any calculations, analysis or testing carried out.

12 Responsibilities

Managers/Supervisors

Are duty holders in accordance with the Regulations and Code
and need to ensure these procedures are implemented within their area of responsibility and that all workers, for whom they are responsible, are informed regarding noise and hearing loss in the workplace.

Officers

have a duty to exercise due diligence to ensure that the University complies with the WHS Act and Regulations. This includes taking reasonable steps to ensure that University has and uses appropriate resources and processes to eliminate or minimise risks that arise from noise.

Workers

have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that they do not adversely affect the health and safety of other persons. Workers must comply with any reasonable instruction and cooperate with any reasonable policy or procedure relating to health and safety at the workplace.

WHS Committee

Develop University WHS policies, procedures and guidance in order to provide direction and support for University management, staff and students in meeting the provisions of this Minimum Standard.

Monitor the effectiveness of this Minimum Standard.

WHS Unit

Oversee the University's compliance with this Minimum Standard, and provide advice / guidance to Organisational Units.

Approve any exemptions to meeting Minimum Standard requirements.

13 Glossary

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term/Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Decibel (dB)</td>
<td>is the unit for measuring sound levels.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exposure standard for noise</td>
<td>is defined in the WHS Regulations as an LAeq,8h of 85 dB(A) or an LC,peak of 140 dB(C). There are two parts to the exposure standard for noise because noise can either cause gradual hearing loss over a period of time or be so loud that it causes immediate hearing loss.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAeq,8h</td>
<td>means the eight hour equivalent continuous A-weighted sound pressure level in decibels, referenced to 20 micropascals, determined in accordance with AS/NZS 1269.1. This is related to the total amount of noise energy a person is exposed to in the course of their working day. It takes account of both the noise level and the length of time the person is exposed to it. An unacceptable risk of hearing loss occurs at LAeq,8h values above 85 dB(A).</td>
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Hazardous noise in relation to hearing loss means noise that exceeds the exposure standard for noise in the workplace.

LC,peak means the C-weighted peak sound pressure level in decibels, referenced to 20 micropascals, determined in accordance with AS/NZS 1269.1. It usually relates to loud, sudden noises such as a gunshot or hammering. LC,peak values above 140 dB(C) can cause immediate damage to hearing.

Manager/Supervisor An individual, who assumes responsibility for the health or welfare of any other person in a workplace by providing instruction, direction, assistance, advice or service, (including those with responsibility for students).

Risk control means taking action to first eliminate health and safety risks so far as is reasonably practicable, and if that is not possible, minimising the risks so far as is reasonably practicable. Eliminating a hazard will also eliminate any risks associated with that hazard.

Worker Any University staff member, contractor, volunteer or student undertaking work experience.

14 Supporting Documentation
- Work Health and Safety Policy
- Managing Noise and Preventing Hearing Loss at Work Code of Practice (Tas) 2012

15 Versioning

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<tr>
<td>Version 1</td>
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<td>Approved March, 2000; by OHS Committee; revoked by the WHS Committee, 27 August 2013.</td>
<td>Managing Noise and Preventing Hearing Loss at Work Minimum Standard (current document); amendment to reflect reference to relevant Legislation – approved by the Executive Director, August 2014</td>
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<td>Hearing Conservation Management Policy and Procedures; Approved March, 2000; by OHS Committee; revoked by the WHS Committee, 27 August 2013.</td>
<td>Managing Noise and Preventing Hearing Loss at Work Minimum Standard; updated to comply with the new Work Health and Safety Act 2012; approved October, 2013</td>
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