



WHSE TOOLBOX TALKS

#5 Hazardous Noise

BACKGROUND

Hazardous noise can destroy the ability to hear clearly and can also make it more difficult to hear sounds necessary for working safely, such as instructions or warning signals. The nature of the work within the scheme involves manual and mechanical counting, sorting and loading of containers into cages and skips, which produce noise. This is particularly the case for glass.

DEFINITIONS

Decibel (dB) - is the unit used to indicate the relative magnitude of sound pressure level and other acoustical quantities

WHAT IS HAZARDOUS NOISE?

Noise is measured in decibels and becomes hazardous when it exceeds workplace exposure standards. The exposure standard for noise is defined in the WHS Regulations and consists of two parts - gradual hearing loss over a period of time (85 dB or greater over 8hrs) or be so loud (peak of 140 dB) that it causes immediate hearing loss ^[2,5].

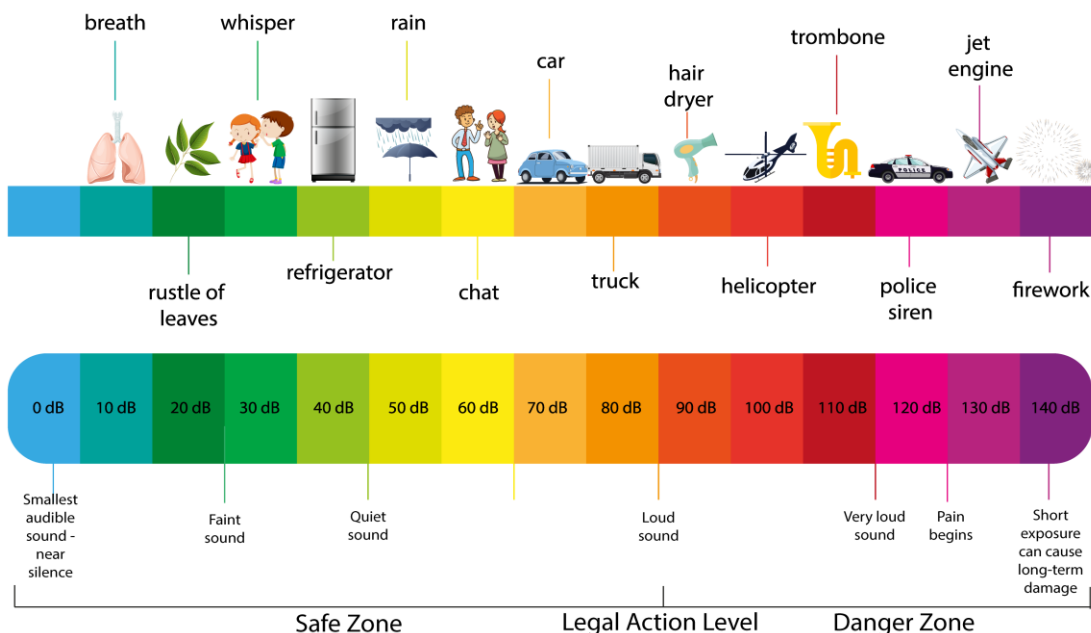


FIGURE 1. Examples of decibel levels for common sounds

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Noise can impact people in different ways and the potential for it to cause harm is not always obvious. Noise can affect workers by:

- being too loud – causing temporary or permanent hearing loss or tinnitus
- being distracting – low level, repeated noise can increase the risk of fatigue, high blood pressure and heart disease
- making it difficult to hear the instructions, warnings and other sounds we need to keep safe

TOOLBOX TIPS

- ✓ Print copies of this sheet for yourself and each of the workers
- ✓ Lead a discussion with your workers at a location appropriate to the topic
- ✓ Be sure to give real life examples whenever possible and ask your workers for their experiences
- ✓ Be open to questions
- ✓ Conclude with a brief review of the main points or a summary based on the discussion
- ✓ Have each worker sign your sheet to confirm their attendance
- ✓ Sign, date and file your sheet in your worker training records to document the training experience

This toolbox is background information ONLY. Be sure to customise your talk to your operation and facilities. The following tips are some helpful suggestions with getting the best out of your toolbox.



WHSE TOOLBOX TALKS - HAZARDOUS NOISE

HOW TO MANAGE HAZARDOUS NOISE RISKS

Exposure to hazardous noise may be prevented and managed by following the principles of a three-step risk management process [1]:

Hazard Identification

The first step in the risk management process is to identify all noise sources at your place of work through the following processes:

- **Inspecting your business** - You can identify hazards by looking at your place of work and how work is carried out. Note the potential for noise to be hazardous is not always obvious. Exposure to noise is cumulative and a worker may perform a number of noisy work activities over time which, in combination, may expose the worker to hazardous noise.
- **Talking to your workers** - Consult with workers and any health and safety representatives at each step of the risk management process. By drawing on their experience, knowledge, and ideas, you're more likely to identify all hazards and choose effective control measures.
- **Reviewing available information** - Read information and advice from a wide range of sources about noise hazards and risks. This should include equipment guidelines and workers' compensation data for your organisation and industry.

Risk Assessment

If you have identified any noisy activities that may expose your workers or other people at your workplace to hazardous noise then, unless you can reduce the exposures to below the standard immediately, you should assess the risks by carrying out a noise assessment.

Risk Control

Use the Hierarchy of Controls to aim to eliminate the hazard so far as reasonably possible. If it's not reasonably to eliminate the hazard, you must minimise risk with one or more controls.

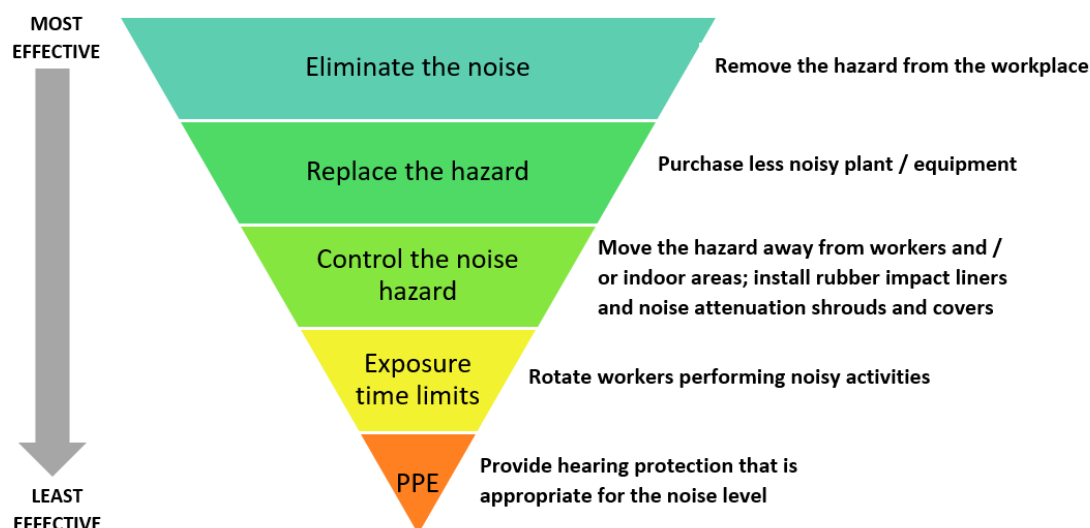


FIGURE 2. Examples of hierarchy of controls for noise [3,4,5,6]

The above controls should be supported by training and where required, audiometric testing of workers.

Training topics covered should include hazardous noise and its' effects on hearing; the nature and location of noise hazards in the workplace associated with the technology, plant and/or work practices; the specific control measures which are necessary in relation to each employee's own job; when and how to use personal hearing protectors provided, including selection, fitting, proper care and maintenance; the arrangements for reporting defects in plant or the workplace which are likely to cause exposure to excessive noise; and the purpose and nature of audiometric testing [6].

RESOURCES/REFERENCES

[1] Work Health and Safety Act, s.17; [2] WHS Regulation Qld 2011, s.56; [3] Managing noise and preventing hearing loss at work COP – WHSQ; [4] Australian Standard AS/NZS 1270:2002: Acoustics – Hearing protectors; [5] National Standard for Occupational Noise 1007(2000); [6] National Code of Practice for Noise Management and Protection of Hearing at Work 2009(2004)

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