

Introduction

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MRFs are typically very noisy places with noise levels often exceeding the point at which employers must take action. Exposure to excessive noise can over time lead to permanent hearing loss. In addition high noise levels can cause irritability and lead to loss of concentration which can contribute to mistakes and accidents.

Why should hearing loss be considered in the workplace?

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Hearing loss due to ageing is normal but when normal hearing loss is combined with hearing loss due to prolonged exposure, it is then people may realise just how deaf they have become. Hearing loss can also be immediate caused by exposure to sudden, extremely loud noises. Although preventable there is no cure for loss. The Control of Noise at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 requires employers to control noise exposure to employees in the workplace. The equipment in a MRF is likely to expose employees to excessive noise levels.

What to do about Noise

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- » Stand 2 metres away from your work mate and try talking. If you have to shout to be heard, as a general rule of thumb, this indicates further assessment is required by the Regulations. The probable noise level is at least 85dB(A).
- » A noise assessment is made using a special noise meter. This meter along with an analysis of work patterns allows the assessor to measure an individual's daily noise exposure.
- » Employers are required to eliminate or reduce noise levels. This could be by – changing to a quieter machine, moving it farther away, having it properly maintained, placing it inside a special enclosure to reduce the noise exposure, using linings to dampen noise impacts or even fitting anti-vibration mountings.
- » If after doing all that is reasonably practicable, the noise is still above 80dB(A) but below 85dB(A) you can ask for hearing protection which should be made available by the employer.
- » If the noise is above 85dB(A), the upper exposure action level, the employer has a duty to ensure hearing protection is worn. In other words hearing protection must be provided and you must wear it.
- » Hearing protection must be suitable and a good fit. Cotton wool is totally ineffective as hearing protection. Earmuffs or ear plugs must be looked after and maintained.
- » Hearing Protection Zones provide a way to help manage the use of hearing protection. They remind you that hearing protection is compulsory during a particular job or activity, or in a particular area.
- » Remember employees have a duty to co-operate with their employer to enable them to carry out legal duties.

Any Questions & Summarise Main Points

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