

Control of Noise at Work Policy

Policy Information

Policy number: 1383

Classification: Corporate

Supersedes: N/A

Version number: V1

Date of Equality Impact Assessment: 18/06/2025

Approval information

Approved by: Health and Safety Sub-Committee / Estates & Facilities CCG QHS

Date of approval: 21.08.2025

Date made active: 01.09.2025

Review date: 19.08.2028

Summary of document:

This document provides guidance on the arrangements for managing the control of noise as part of the Health Board's responsibility to staff under Health & Safety Legislation.

Scope:

This policy is applicable to all Hywel Dda University Health Board (HDdUHB) staff, including Independent Members, volunteers, those seconded into the Organisation or holding honorary contracts, locums and students.

To be read in conjunction with:

[010 – Health and Safety Policy](#) - opens in a new tab

[608 – Risk Management Framework](#) – opens in a new tab

[674 – Risk Assessment Procedure](#)– opens in a new tab

[982 – Incident, Near Miss and Hazard Reporting Procedure](#) – opens in a new tab

Owning group:

Health & Safety Manager and Key Stakeholders 28/05/2025

Executive Director job title: Director of Allied Health Professions and Health Sciences

Reviews and updates:

New policy – version 1 21.08.2025

Keywords

Noise, dB, decibels

Glossary of terms

SSoW – Safe System of Work

HSE – Health and Safety Executive

EAV – Exposure Action Value

ELV – Exposure Limit Value

PPE – Personal Protective Equipment

dB – Decibels

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Introduction

Noise is part of everyday life, however exposure to excessive noise can cause temporary and permanent hearing damage and even hearing loss. This can be hearing loss that gets worse over time, damage caused by sudden, extremely loud noises, or tinnitus (permanent ringing in the ears). The effects of noise may be accumulative and ultimately irreversible.

Hywel Dda University Health Board (HDdUHB) has a general duty under Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable the health, safety and welfare at work of employees. Furthermore, the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 requires the employer to identify those areas or working practices, which may give rise to noise problems and assess the risk.

The noise risk assessment needs to consider options to eliminate or control hazardous noise in the workplace in order to decrease the degree of exposure risk to as low as is reasonably practicable. Noise can also interfere with communication, therefore this must also be considered by the risk assessment to ensure that safety is not compromised, either by noise in the workplace, or by control measures introduced.

Policy statement

HDdUHB recognises the risks posed to staff when exposed to excessive noise in the workplace and will manage, so far as is reasonably practicable, noise hazards falling under its control. This policy demonstrates HDdUHB's commitment to reducing the risks associated with exposure to excessive noise and the continued improvement of employee health, safety and welfare.

Scope

This policy is applicable to all HDdUHB staff who may be exposed to excessive noise in the workplace. However, it is likely that specific steps required by the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 will only be required in the following areas and/or situations:

- Boiler houses, generator rooms and compressor rooms (when the plant is in operation);
- Engineering and carpenters' workshops – during defined activity;
- Activities using power tools carried out by Estates staff or contractors;
- Grounds maintenance operations.

Aim

This policy aims to protect employees and others, so far as is reasonably practicable, from the risks posed to staff from exposure to excessive noise in the workplace. HDdUHB will aim to achieve this by putting measures in place to control exposure to excessive noise at work so far as is reasonably practicable. When selecting controls to manage exposure to noise risks, HDdUHB will apply the hierarchy of controls as set out in the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005.

Objectives

The aim of this document will be achieved by the following objectives, following the hierarchy of controls:

- HDdUHB will, so far as is reasonably practicable, manage excessive noise in the workplace at source, reducing noise exposure to as low a level as is reasonably practicable;
- Where employees are likely to be exposed to a risk from excessive noise, HDdUHB shall make and keep up to date suitable & sufficient noise risk assessments;
- HDdUHB will provide employees with suitable information, instruction & training;
- Where an assessment indicates that noise exposure is a risk to the health of employees, then health surveillance shall be carried out in line with HDdUHB's Occupational Health Policy and associated procedures.

Responsibilities

Chief Executive

The Chief Executive is responsible to the Board of HDdUHB for the implementation of the arrangements and procedures required to implement this policy and to achieve compliance with legislation in standards of health and safety. These are outlined in more detail within HDdUHB 010 – [Health and Safety Policy](#). (opens in a new tab)

Executive Director of Allied Health Professions and Health Science

The Executive Director of Allied Health Professions and Health Science has delegated Executive Board responsibility for the management of Health and Safety and therefore the operational implementation of this policy. This includes ensuring that all risks associated with exposure to excessive noise in the workplace are adequately controlled, suitable and sufficient risk assessments are undertaken, suitable control measures are implemented to control the risks identified, and any health issues resulting from exposure to noise at work are reported and investigated thoroughly in line with this policy.

Senior Managers including Clinical Care Group and Clinical Service Group Directors, General Managers, System Leads, Heads of Departments etc

Senior Managers are accountable for the effective day-to-day management of health and safety within their areas of responsibility. This includes ensuring full compliance with relevant legislation, notably the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005, and the implementation of safe systems of work (SSoW).

They must ensure:

- Staff, including agency, bank, and apprentice workers, receive appropriate noise awareness training prior to engaging in tasks that may generate excessive noise.
- Suitable and sufficient risk assessments are conducted for noise-related work activities.
- Documented and implemented systems of work are in place to mitigate noise risks.
- All relevant policies, procedures, and updates are communicated to employees and others affected.
- Line Managers and Supervisors are adequately trained to fulfil their roles.
- Necessary resources are identified and financial requirements incorporated into budget planning.

Line Managers/Supervisors

All Line Managers / Supervisors including Estates Officers, Estates Supervisors, Facilities Managers and Facilities Supervisors & Co-ordinators etc are responsible for:

- identifying employees who are exposed to excessive noise in the workplace;
- ensuring that suitable and sufficient risk assessments are completed for any work activities undertaken by employees where excessive noise is a foreseeable risk and implement control measures which reduce the risk so far as is reasonably practicable;
- ensure that where ear protection has been identified as necessary through the risk assessment process, adequate signage is in place for noisy machines, designated Noise Protection Zones are applied as required and instruction in the use of hearing protection is given;
- enforcing the use of hearing protection (such as ear defenders) and also checking on a six-monthly basis the integrity and condition of hearing protection to ensure that it is providing the necessary protection;
- keeping records of hearing protection checks for three years;
- ensuring that all employees receive information, instruction and training on the management of exposure to excessive noise in the workplace;
- ensuring that control measures resulting from the risk assessment and safe working practices are adhered to by employees, including; the use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), job rotation, appropriate breaks etc.
- ensuring that noise levels are considered when purchasing/hiring/utilising tools;
- ensure that all tools, plant and equipment are properly maintained, inspected and used in a safe manner; and that those instructions are followed;
- ensuring staff attend health surveillance as and when requested;
- eliminating exposure to excessive noise where advised by Occupational Health or another clinical physician.

Employees

In addition to their duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and subsequent legislation and guidance, employees will assist their managers by:

- complying with requirements of this policy, local procedures and risk assessed control measures;
- adhering to safe systems of work or training and awareness for the purposes of reducing the risks from excessive noise exposure in the workplace. This may include the correct use of any hearing protection provided and the following of any work methods that are put in place for their safety;
- advising HDdUHB on any medically related issues or conditions which may affect their work with tools or equipment that generate significant noise;
- reporting any concerns or symptoms to their line manager as soon as possible, including issues of work practices, in order that remedial actions can be taken;
- attending the Occupational Health Department for the purposes of health surveillance, as and when directed.

Health, Safety and Security Department

Reporting to the Director of Allied Health Professions and Health Sciences, the Health Safety and Security Department will be responsible through HDdUHB's Health and Safety management system for:

- reporting to Health and Safety Sub-Committee any reported issues relating to excessive noise exposure in the workplace and the action taken to prevent recurrence;
- development of HDdUHB Control of Noise Policy and advising on the local implementation procedures;
- monitoring and review of the effectiveness of HDdUHB Policy and locally implemented procedures, in conjunction with the Operations Compliance Team in the Estates Department;
- assisting and reviewing the process of risk assessment;
- communicating changes in legislation and best practice.

Occupational Health

Reporting to the Assistant Director for Workforce and Organisational Development, the Occupational Health Department will be responsible for:

- providing a confidential service to all staff and deliver specialist advice on the effects of health on work and the effects of work on health;
- working closely with managers and provide advice, when requested on the suitability, availability and appropriateness of health surveillance;
- undertaking appropriate health surveillance as identified through risk assessment and legislation;
- keeping records for the appropriate lengths of time;
- giving feedback and guidance on risk to individuals following health surveillance;
- advising the appropriate manager if there are restrictions on an individual's ability to work due to health risks;
- giving feedback on the results from health surveillance to the appropriate managers, operational safety groups and the Health and Safety Team.

Legal framework

HDdUHB has a duty under the Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, to secure the health, safety and welfare of its employees and others who may be affected by its working activities. In addition, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require the Health Board to assess the risk to employees' safety and welfare, implement adequate controls and health surveillance where necessary.

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 require HDdUHB to protect employees against risks from the exposure to excessive noise at work. HDdUHB must make sure that risks from excessive noise in the workplace are assessed and controlled. It must provide information, instruction and training to employees on the risks identified and the actions being taken to control them and provide suitable health surveillance.

The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 require employers to select and use equipment that is suited to maintain the health and safety of the user. This duty includes the consideration of residual noise hazards associated with equipment used.

Noise exposure levels

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 require employers to take specific action at certain action values in relation to noise. These relate to:

- Noise levels which the employees are exposed to, averaged over a working day or week; and
- The maximum noise (peak sound pressure) to which the employees are exposed to within a working day.

There are two different Exposure Action Values (EAVs) to be aware of:

- Lower EAV (LEAV):
 - Daily or weekly exposure of 80 dB(A)
 - Peak sound pressure of 135 dB(C)
- Upper EAV (UEAV):
 - Daily or weekly exposure of 85 dB(A)
 - Peak sound pressure of 137 dB(C)

There are also levels of noise exposure which must not be exceeded. These are called Exposure Limit Values (ELV):

- Daily or weekly exposure of 87 dB(A)
- Peak sound pressure of 140 dB(C)

Where the exposure of an employee to noise varies markedly from day to day, an employer may use weekly personal noise exposure in place of daily personal noise exposure for the purpose of compliance with the Regulations. The HSE has produced a calculator to assist in calculating exposure to noise over both daily and weekly periods. For further information on the calculation, help or any guidance contact the Health and Safety Team.

Risk assessment

To effectively manage the risk from exposure to hazardous noise in the workplace, suitable and sufficient risk assessments must be undertaken to identify the main sources of hazardous noise within the workplace, who is exposed, the levels of exposure and what work equipment is involved.

All reasonably practicable steps should be taken to reduce exposure to hazardous noise in the working environment and managers must contact the Health, Safety and Security Department if they identify a significant risk of hazardous noise in their workplace, so that a full formal noise risk assessment can be organised.

The full formal noise risk assessment will be undertaken by a competent person and will include

assessing workers exposure to noise, including both the noise level and the duration of exposure using a Sound Level Meter. The findings will be used to develop an action plan to control the risks identified.

This risk assessment will be suitable and sufficient if:

- It is carried out by a competent person;
- It is based on advice and information from competent sources;
- It identifies where there may be a risk from noise and who is likely to be affected;
- It contains a reliable estimate of employee noise exposures and comparison of exposure with the EAVs and the ELV;
- It identifies the measures necessary to eliminate risks and exposures or reduce them to as low a level as reasonably practicable;
- It identifies those employees who need to be provided with health surveillance and whether any employees are at particular risk.

Calculating the LEAV, UEAV and ELV requires complex calculations. In order to simplify the process the HSE created a noise exposure calculator (see <https://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/assets/docs/noise-exp-calc.xlsm>- opens in a new tab).

Should any work, which as a result of a risk assessment and noise survey indicates levels above the LEAV (i.e. daily or weekly exposure of 80 dB(A) or peak sound pressure of 135 dB(C)), employees shall be notified and advised of the risk from noise.

In any area where the noise levels exceeds the UEAV (i.e. daily or weekly exposure of 85 dB(A) or peak sound pressure of 137 dB(C)), these areas will be designated as Noise Protection Zones (NPZ) and only authorized staff, equipped with the appropriate hearing protection may work in those areas. Employees shall be informed of the risk and provided with appropriate hearing protection by the local management.

Control measures

HDdUHB will ensure that risk from the exposure of employees to hazardous noise in the workplace is either eliminated at source or, where this is not reasonably practicable, reduced to as low a level as is reasonably practicable and will assess exposure levels and effects. HDdUHB will always prioritise physical control measures (e.g. enclosing noisy processes or purchasing/hiring quieter tools and machinery) and organisational controls (e.g. limiting time exposure in noisy areas) over hearing protection wherever reasonably practicable to do so.

Hearing protection should only be considered to control residual risk where it is not reasonably practicable to further control the level of noise through physical and organisational controls.

Where employee exposure is likely to exceed the LEAV:

- Hearing protection should be made available for all who request it;
- Information, instruction and training on noise will be provided for staff;
- Health surveillance is recommended for high-risk employees.

Where employee exposure is likely to exceed the UEAV:

- Hearing protection must be provided for all staff to ensure that the daily noise dose is reduced to below 85 dB(A);
- The area must be designated as an NPZ. The area must be demarcated and identified by means of suitable signage indicating that ear protection must be worn;
- Health surveillance is required for all employees.

Where employee exposure is likely to exceed the ELV:

- Work must cease. The ELV must not be exceeded.

Note: The EAVs and ELV take into account any reduction in exposure provided by hearing protection.

Hearing Protection

Any hearing protection supplied by HDdUHB will be selected so as to eliminate the risk to hearing or to reduce the risk to as low a level as is reasonably practicable. Managers will consult staff with regards to the type selected.

Important considerations include:

- Hearing protection must not introduce new risks – for example, specifying hearing protection that provides excessive noise reduction may affect awareness of one's surroundings (such as awareness of alarms, other people, vehicle movements), which may increase risk in some settings;
- More than one type of hearing protection may be required for staff performing different tasks **(Note: Managers may be tempted to buy one pair of “the best” pair of ear defenders rather than more than one pair of different defenders, and it may be overprotective for some less noisy outdoor activities where awareness of surroundings is important e.g. vehicle movements);**
- Other PPE, such as protective eyewear or even corrective spectacles, that is incompatible with the hearing protection may not be worn by the user and may therefore increase risk; or if worn may reduce the performance of the hearing protection;
- Additional care is needed when specifying hearing protection for use in workplaces with significant low-frequency noise (such as in boiler and generator rooms).

Where hearing protection is provided, HDdUHB will train staff on its correct use. Employees must wear hearing protection as per their training. This will need to be monitored via local line management to ensure that staff wear it at all times when undertaking noisy work, and particularly when in Noise

Protection Zones (NPZ). Employees should understand that taking hearing protection off even for short periods of time significantly reduces the overall protection provided by the hearing protection, meaning that their hearing could still be damaged. Any problems with hearing protection must be reported immediately to the line manager.

Information, instruction and training

Where staff are likely to be exposed above the LEAV they should be provided with training so that they understand the risks they may be exposed to, and their duties and responsibilities. As a minimum the training should cover:

- Duties are under the Control of Noise Regulations;
- Noise exposure and the risk to hearing this creates;
- How to control risks and exposures;
- Where and how to obtain hearing protection;
- How to identify and report defects in noise-control equipment and hearing protection;
- What to do to minimise the risk, such as the proper way to use noise control equipment and hearing protection;
- HDdUHB's health surveillance systems.

Training records will be kept on ESR, along with a declaration of attendance sheet, signed and dated by operatives.

Refresher training will be provided at regular interval to ensure that members of staff retained their knowledge and competencies in relation to the control of noise at work.

Health surveillance

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, along with the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 require appropriate health surveillance to be provided to employees, where the noise risk assessments identify it to be necessary.

Health surveillance shall be carried out by HDdUHB Occupational Health Department where a noise risk assessment indicates that there is a risk to the health of our employees who are, or are liable to be, regularly exposed to noise above the UEAV, regardless of the hearing protection provided.

Health surveillance will also be required for individuals regularly exposed to the LEAV and who already have a hearing deficiency or who have a family history of early deafness.

The aim of a noise health surveillance programme is to safeguard employees but also to check the long-term effectiveness of control measures. Health surveillance involves regular hearing checks to

measure the sensitivity of hearing over a range of sound frequencies. Evidence of all employees undergoing health surveillance shall be recorded and maintained for at least 40 years.

Reporting of noise-related ill health

If staff members suffer any symptoms that are related to noise exposure or noise-related ill health, these must be reported to their Line Manager immediately. If following an Occupational Health referral noise-related ill health is diagnosed, these instances must be reported via Datix.

Monitoring compliance, audit & review

Monitoring and auditing of compliance with this policy will be undertaken as part of the corporate health & safety audit schedule.

This document will be reviewed every three years or earlier should audit results or changes to legislation / practice within HDdUHB indicate otherwise.

Records

It is essential that records maintained on all aspects of the above. These records will include:

- details of any noise measurements taken by a competent person;
- risk assessments;
- details of work practices, periods of exposure for employees and monitoring;
- equipment purchase information;
- a register of all plant and equipment;
- pre-employment assessments of employees;
- health surveillance questionnaires/reports, including any Occupational Health Physician reports or other specialist medical information.

References

- 'Controlling noise at work – The Control of Noise at Work 2005 Regulations: Guidance on Regulations', L108, HSE;
- 'Noise at work: A brief guide to controlling the risks' INDG362(Rev2), HSE;
- 'Management of Noise at Work', Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust, Version 3, 2022;
- 'Control of Noise in the Workplace Policy' (HSP 12), Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust, Version 2.0, 2021;
- 'Control of Noise at Work Procedure' (HS09), Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, 2021.

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website: www.hse.gov.uk/noise (link below)

[Noise at work](#) – Opens in new page.