



# Control of Noise at Work Policy and Procedure

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This document replaces: 012 Noise Procedure V5	Consultation & Approval: Area Health and Safety Committee
Notification of Policy Release: Intranet	
Date of Issue: March 2018	Date of next review: March 2021
Version: V6	

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## 1.0 Purpose

1.1. NHS 24 is committed to complying with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005.

1.2. This policy gives detail of how harm can be caused to the human condition by noise and gives detail of how that harm can be recognised and controlled to within safe limits, in so far as is reasonably practicable.

## 2.0. Scope

2.1. This policy applies to all employees (including agency workers), contractors, visitors, volunteers and Members of the Public (MOP's) and the guidance provided within should be adhered to by all.

2.2. This policy aims to; Protect against risk to both health and safety from exposure to noise. The health risk of hearing damage to those exposed and safety risks such as the noise affecting the ability to hear instructions or warnings.

## 3. Definitions

Daily personal noise exposure (LEPD):	means the level of daily personal noise exposure of an Employee as ascertained in accordance with Appendix 2 taking account of the level of noise and the duration of exposure and covering all noise.
Competent:	The combination of training, skills, experience and knowledge that a person has and their ability to apply them to perform a task safely to reduce risk.
Exposure limit value:	Means the level of daily or weekly personal noise exposure or of peak sound pressure set out in exposure limit values and action values which must not be exceeded
Health surveillance:	Means assessment of the state of health of an employee, as related to exposure to noise.
Lower exposure action value:	Means the lower of the two levels of daily or weekly personal noise exposure or of peak sound pressure set out in exposure limit values and action values which, if reached or exceeded, requires specified action to be taken to reduce risks.
Noise:	Means any audible sound.
Peak sound pressure:	Means the maximum sound pressure to which an employee is exposed.
Reasonably practicable:	Measurement of the cost versus the risk
Upper exposure action value:	Means the higher of the two levels of daily or weekly personal Noise exposure or of peak sound pressure set out in Appendix 1 which, if reached or exceeded, requires specified action to be taken
Decibel (dB):	The unit of measurement for loudness of a sound. The higher the dB, the louder the sound.
Action Levels:	The levels of exposure to noise averaged out over a working day or week or the maximum noise to The levels of exposure to noise averaged out over a working day or week or the maximum noise to which and employee is exposed in a working day.
Maximum Exposure Values:	The levels of noise exposure that must not be exceeded

Control Measure:	Any measure to reduce the risk in the workplace, eg. Standard Operating Procedures, mechanical device, personal protective equipment, training, restricted access zones.
Acoustic Shock:	A sudden, unexpected noise event which is perceived as loud, transmitted through a telephone or headset that may cause an adverse reaction

## 4.0 Duties, Responsibilities and Reporting

### 4.1. Chief Executive

4.1.1. The Chief Executive has, on behalf of NHS 24, overall responsibility for health and safety matters including those related to controlling noise.

### 4.2. Executive Directors

#### 4.2.1. Director of Workforce

The Director of Workforce has designated authority for the implementation of all Health and Safety policies within the organisation including Noise at Work.

Director of Workforce is responsible for:

- Ensuring that all Health and Safety issues are appropriately considered for all NHS 24 decisions.
- Ensuring that Health and Safety is appropriately resourced.
- Ensuring that competent Health and Safety advice is available.
- Ensuring the Health and Safety system is effective and audited annually.

4.2.2 All other Executive Directors have responsibilities to ensure that the necessary arrangements are in place for NHS 24 to be able to manage noise at work.

### 4.3. Head of Operations/Operational Managers/Other Senior Managers

4.3.1. Heads of Operations/Operational Managers/Other Senior Managers will be responsible for:

- Implementing this policy within their areas of responsibility;
- Having an understanding of this policy and the associated arrangements;
- Having adequate resources and structures in place to comply with relevant regulations

### 4.4. Line Managers

4.4.1. Line Managers are responsible for controlling noise at work within their respective areas and must ensure that this policy is implemented in those areas. Their responsibilities include:

- Ensuring that work equipment is fit for purpose and concerns over controlling noise at work are reported to the Health and Safety Lead;

- Ensuring that employees are aware of this policy.
- Raising any concerns with their line manager and the Health and Safety Lead

#### 4.5. Facilities Manager

4.5.1. Facilities Manager is responsible for;

- Ensuring that noise risk assessments at NHS 24 locations are undertaken and Identify any tasks/equipment that are likely to exceed the statutory noise levels and that any remedial concerns are flagged to the appropriate department for rectification;
- Monitoring of noise risk assessments completed for work equipment used by NHS 24.
- Ensuring that work equipment used within their area of responsibility i.e. (Boilers, air conditioning, lifts) is used in a safe manner and complies with current legislation relating to noise;
- Ensuring that adequate maintenance is carried out on work equipment within their area of responsibility;
- Rectifying concerns over noise at work in regards to the Estate;
- Ensuring that responsibilities for controlling noise/exposure to noise are set out in contractual arrangements. Contractors should know in what areas they should use hearing protection and know how to obtain it (this should be covered in an induction).
- Providing advice and guidance to managers and staff to assist them;
- Where requested and or appropriate provide guidance to managers on the Investigation of all reported incidents involving noise and on appropriate actions to be taken to prevent reoccurrence;
- Maintain and collate through the use of the NHS 24 Incident Reporting System, All reported incidents involving noise and include a summary report of these to the Area Health and Safety Committee.

#### 4.6 Safety Representatives

Safety Representatives, appointed by recognised trade unions or by NHS 24, represent the employees in consultation with NHS 24 on all aspects of Health and Safety at Work including noise.

Safety reps have certain rights and functions including the legal right to:

- represent workers in talks with the employer or the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or other safety or environmental enforcement agencies
- investigate noise related complaints, possible hazards and dangerous incidents
- carry out regular inspections of the workplace
- take part in noise related risk assessments

In addition to this, reference should also be made to the PIN policy: Facilities arrangements for trade unions and Professional Organisations.

## 4.7. Employees

### 4.7.1. Employees should:

- Take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and of other persons who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work;
- Co-operate with management to achieve the aims of this policy;
- Report all incidents including those involving noise to their manager and in accordance with this policy and NHS 24's Incident Reporting System;
- Use the equipment and safety devices supplied or given, properly and in accordance with any training and instructions (unless this would be unsafe, in which case seek further instruction);
- Not use work equipment if it is faulty, damaged or unsafe and to report for repair/disposal;
- Make full use and proper use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) personal hearing protectors provided by NHS 24 and of any other control measures provided;
- Report any defect to any PPE - personal hearing protectors or other control measure to the Line Manager as soon as is practicable;
- Raising any concerns with their line manager and the Health and Safety Lead

## 4.8. Any Person requesting items to be procured

### 4.8.1. Any Person requesting items to be procured is responsible for;

- Completing a risk assessment prior to purchasing work equipment in line with the Provision and Use of Work Equipment policy. Completed risk assessments must be returned to the Health, Safety Department;
- Ensuring that work equipment purchased is suitable for usage (and that machinery and equipment purchased is low noise producing);
- Obtain information from the manufacture/suppliers and identify any additional hazards such as noise.

## 5.0. Strategy for Compliance

5.1. Assessment of the risk to health and safety created by exposure to noise at the workplace.

5.1.1. NHS 24 will carry out a 'suitable and sufficient' assessment of the risk From noise to the health and safety of employees where work is likely to expose employees to noise at or above a lower exposure action value.

5.1.2. To conduct a 'suitable and sufficient' noise risk assessment NHS 24 will:

- Observe specific working practices;

- Refer to relevant information on the probable levels of noise corresponding to any equipment used in the particular working conditions; and
- If necessary, measure the level of noise to which NHS 24 employees are likely to be exposed and the Service will assess whether any employees are likely to be exposed to noise at or above a lower exposure action value, an upper exposure action value or an exposure limit value.

## 5.2. Noise Risk Assessment

5.2.1 If NHS 24 is in doubt that a noise risk assessment requires to be completed then it can safely be assumed that the lower exposure action value has been exceeded. It is likely that this will be the case if noise is intrusive for most of the working day; employees have to raise their voice for normal conversation when about 2m apart for at least part of the day and employees use noise power tools or machinery for more than half an hour each day.

5.2.2. A competent person will on behalf of NHS 24, carry out a 'suitable and sufficient' noise risk assessment using Noise Assessment Record form Appendix 2 (or another appropriate recording mechanism pre approved by the Health and Safety Consultant and this shall include:

- The level, type and duration of exposure, including any exposure to peak sound pressure;
- The effects of exposure to noise on employees or groups of employees whose health is at particular risk from such exposure;
- So far as is practicable, any effects on the health and safety of employees resulting from interaction between noise and the use of ototoxic substances at work, or between noise and vibration;
- Any indirect effects on the health and safety of employees resulting from the interaction between noise and audible warning signals or other sounds that need to be audible in order to reduce risk at work;
- Any information provided by the manufacturers of work equipment
- The availability of alternative equipment designed to reduce the emission of noise
- Any extension of exposure to noise at the workplace beyond normal working hours, including exposure in rest facilities supervised by the employer;
- Appropriate information obtained following health surveillance, including, where possible, published information; and
- The availability of personal hearing protectors with adequate attenuation characteristics.

5.2.3. The noise risk assessment will be reviewed regularly and if;

- There is reason to suspect that the noise risk assessment is no longer valid; Or;
- There has been a significant change in the work to which the assessment relates and where as a result of the review, changes to the noise risk assessment are required, those changes shall be made.

5.2.4. A noise risk assessment will be 'suitable and sufficient' if:

- Drawn up by someone who is 'competent' to carry out the task;
- Based on advice and information from competent sources;
- Identifies where there may be a risk from noise and who is likely to be affected;
- Contains a reliable estimate of employees' noise exposures and a comparison of exposure with the exposure action values and limit values;
- Identifies the measures necessary to eliminate risks and exposures or reduce them to as low a level as is reasonably practicable;
- Identifies those employees who need to be provided with health surveillance and whether any employees are at particular risk.

5.2.5. A noise risk assessment is more than just taking measurements of noise, Measurements may not even be necessary.

5.2.6. Sound level meters and Dosimeters (personal sound exposure meter) must be Calibrated as specified by the manufacturer to ensure that noise risk assessments are 'suitable and sufficient'.

### 5.3. Elimination or control of exposure to noise at the workplace

- 5.3.1. NHS 24 will ensure that the risk from the exposure of employees to noise is eliminated at source or, where this is not reasonably practicable, reduced to as low a level as is reasonably practicable.
- 5.3.2. If any employee is likely to be exposed to noise at or above an upper exposure action value, NHS 24 will take steps to reduce exposure to as low a level reasonably practicable by establishing any organisational and technical measures, excluding the provision of personal hearing protectors, which is appropriate to the activity
- 5.3.3. NHS 24 will use the general principles of prevention set out in Schedule 1 of The Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999 to base control of Exposure which are;
- Other working methods which reduce exposure to noise;
  - Choice of appropriate work equipment emitting the least possible noise, taking account of the work to be done;
  - The design and layout of workplaces, workstations and rest facilities;
  - Suitable and sufficient information and training for employees, such that work equipment may be used correctly, in order to minimise their exposure to noise;
  - Reduction of noise by technical means;
  - Appropriate maintenance programmes for work equipment, the workplace and workplace systems;
  - Limitation of the duration and intensity of exposure to noise;
  - Appropriate work schedules with adequate rest periods.

### 5.4. Controlling noise

5.4.1. NHS 24 will take action to eliminate risks from noise exposure completely Wherever it is reasonably practicable to do so;



- If not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risks completely, to reduce them to as low a level as is reasonably practicable;
- To introduce a formal programme of measures to reduce noise exposure whenever an employee's exposure to noise is likely to exceed the upper exposure action values (these measures cannot include hearing protection, which is addressed separately);
- Not to expose anyone above the exposure limit values.

5.4.2. NHS 24 will consider where noisy equipment/machinery is used, other means in which to alert employees to dangerous situations (such as visual alarm devices opposed to sounders). Furthermore NHS 24 will carry out Personal Emergency Evacuations Plans (PEEP's) for employees that may find it difficult to hear fire alarm activation.

## 5.5. Eliminate or reduce risks

5.5.1. When there is a risk from noise and irrespective of whether any exposure action values are exceeded. It is likely, however, that only inexpensive and simple measures will be reasonably practicable if the lower exposure action values are not exceeded. Therefore NHS 24

Will:

- a) Consider whether there are alternative processes, equipment and/or working methods which would eliminate risks from noise exposure;
- b) Follow good practice and industry standard control measures;
- c) Take noise into account when selecting tools and machinery;
- d) Maintain machinery in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations;

5.5.2. Whenever there is noise at work NHS 24 should be looking for alternative processes, equipment and/or working methods which would make the work quieter or mean people are exposed for shorter times.

5.5.3. Even when noise exposures are below upper exposure action values, NHS 24 will take action to reduce the risks, e.g. reducing exposure further.

5.5.4. Where noise levels cannot be controlled by other means the local manager must ensure an adequate supply of suitable PPE is available at all times and that their staff know how to use it properly.

5.5.5. Furthermore, NHS 24 will ensure that employees are not exposed to noise Above an exposure limit value, or if an exposure limit value is exceeded NHS 24

Will, so far is reasonably practicable;

- Identify the reason for that exposure limit value being exceeded
- Reduce exposure to below the exposure limit value;

## 5.6. Hearing Protection

5.6.1. NHS 24 will take the necessary steps aforementioned to control the risk;

however where they are unable to reduce the levels of noise to below an upper exposure action value, NHS 24 will provide personal hearing protectors to any employee who is so exposed.

5.6.2. NHS 24 will provide hearing protection where any employee is likely to be exposed to noise at or above lower exposure action values (upon request).

5.6.3. Where any employees are likely to be exposed to noise at or above an upper exposure action value, NHS 24 will ensure that;

- The area is designated as a hearing protection zone (hearing protection signage);
- Access to the area is restricted where this is practicable and the risk and shall ensure so far as is reasonably practicable that no employee enters that area unless that employee is wearing personal hearing protectors.

5.6.4. Any personal hearing protectors made available or provided shall be selected by NHS 24:

- So as to eliminate the risk to hearing or to reduce the risk to as low a level as is reasonably practicable and;
- After consultation with the employees concerned (or their representatives).

5.6.5. NHS 24 will not provide hearing protectors as an alternative to controlling noise by technical and organisational means.

5.6.6. NHS 24 will make sure hearing protection is worn fully (all of the time they are needed) and properly (fitted or inserted correctly) and that systems of supervision and training is provided. This may require the use of spot checks and audits.

## 5.7. Maintenance and use of equipment

5.7.1 NHS 24 will ensure that equipment is used properly and is maintained in good repair

## 5.8. Use and maintenance of noise – control equipment (such as mufflers or silencers)

5.8.1. NHS 24 will ensure that that any noise – control equipment that is put in place is fully and properly used. Furthermore NHS 24 will ensure that noise – control equipment is maintained and that regular checks are carried out and that any defects are reported to Service Support.

## 5.9. Health Surveillance

5.9.1. NHS 24 will ensure that employees are placed under health surveillance (which shall include testing of their hearing) if the noise risk assessment indicates that there is a risk to the health of the employees.

5.9.2. NHS 24 will retain health records in respect of each employee who Undergoes surveillance and that the record or a copy of a record is kept available in a suitable form.

5.9.3 NHS 24 will (on reasonable notice) give any employee access to their personal health record.

5.9.4. NHS 24 will provide the enforcing authority with copies of health records that may be required.

5.9.5. Hearing loss is usually gradual due to prolonged exposure to noise.

5.9.6. Where as a result of health surveillance, an employee is found to have identifiable hearing damage, NHS 24 will ensure that the employee is examined by a doctor (and if the doctor or any specialist to whom the doctor considers it necessary to refer the employee considers that the damage is likely to be the result of exposure to noise, NHS 24 will;

- Ensure that a suitably qualified person informs the employee accordingly;
- Review the noise risk assessment;
- Review any measure taken to comply with this policy, taking into account any advice given by a doctor or occupational health professional, or by the enforcing authority
- Consider assigning the employee alternative work where there is no risk from further exposure to noise, taking into account any advice given by a doctor or occupational, health professional;
- Ensure continued health surveillance and provide for a review of the health of any other employee who has been similarly exposed.

5.9.7. Any NHS 24 employee who this applies to shall, when required and at the cost of NHS 24, present him/herself during working hours for such health surveillance as may be required.

5.9.8. NHS 24 is not required to provide health surveillance for anyone who is not an employee.

#### 5.10. Exposure or controlling noise in shared premises

5.10.1. NHS 24 will co-operate and co-ordinate responsibilities for noise with other parties in shared premises.

### 6. Training Requirements

6.1. Employees are informed of this policy during induction (which may be done through e-learning or workbooks). Specific information/training will be given where and when required.

6.2. Training will be in line with NHS 24's Training Needs Analysis.

6.3. All persons will be provided with Information, Instruction and Training (IIT) with regards to noise and the control measures.

6.4. NHS 24 will provide employees and their representatives with suitable and sufficient IIT when employees are exposed to noise which is likely to be at or above a lower exposure action value. The IIT will include:

- The nature of risks from exposure to noise;
- The organisational and technical measures taken in order to comply with this policy;
- The exposure limit values and upper and lower exposure action values;
- The significant findings of the noise risk assessment, including any measurements taken, with an explanation of those findings;
- The availability and provision of personal hearing protectors and their correct use;
- Why and how to detect and report signs of hearing damage;
- The entitlement to health surveillance;
- Safe working practices to minimise exposure to noise;
- The collective results of any health surveillance undertaken in a form calculated to prevent those results from being identified as relating to a particular person.

6.5. The IIT will be updated to take account of significant changes in the type of work carried out or the working methods used by NHS 24. NHS 24 will ensure that any person, whether or not an employee, carries out work in connection with the Service has suitable information, instruction, training and supervision.

6.6. NHS 24 will ensure that those persons that carry out noise risk assessment are competent and that they have sufficient equipment to conduct these.

## Acoustic Shock

Acoustic Shock is a potentially serious injury caused when unexpected, short, very loud bursts of piercing noise are heard over telephone lines through headsets. This is the most likely cause of hearing loss within NHS24, the likelihood is very low.

Injuries can range from mild to severe and include pain, hearing loss, tinnitus, sleep loss and noise sensitivity.

The Health and Safety Executive (after an extensive study of 15 call centres in the UK) have indicated that call centre workers should not normally be exposed to the levels of noise likely to cause permanent hearing loss.

Even on the occasion where operators may be exposed to high-intensity noises (such as loud screeches), these noises would usually be excluded by the protection built into the operators' headsets (which has been confirmed by the Manufacturer).

The associated risk is therefore considered to be fairly low, but a traceable reporting and recording system will be followed for those Employees who may be exposed to an Acoustic Shock Incident. Staff should report all incidents using the incident report form.

With reference to the information above the actions which NHS 24 will take to manage potential incidents are detailed in the table below:

<b>Action Required</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>When</b>
1. Noise recordings taken at each site with Audiometer (see appendix 1)	Service Support Managers (Contact Centres)  Office Manager (HQ)	3 times in 24 hour period  One cycle per month
2a. Reporting of potential Acoustic Shock Incidents	By individual exposed (report to line manager)	As required
2b. Referral of Employee to Occupational Health post incident	Health and Safety Consultant will recommend to HR	As required
3. Employees will be asked to declare pre-existing hearing problems prior to employment	Human Resources	Upon recruitment
4. Operate a "positive purchasing policy" whereby only headsets with built in protection against excessive and sudden noises are procured	Service Support Managers	As required
5. Suppliers of all equipment will be asked what measures they are taking	Service Support and IT Managers	As required

to try and prevent Acoustic Shock Incidents occurring		
6. Ensure the Environmental Noise Risk Assessment is completed.	Service Support Managers	Annually

## 7. Monitoring

7.1. This policy will be monitored by the Area Health and Safety Committee. In order to monitor the policy NHS 24 will carry out the following;

- The review of NHS 24 premises with the requirements of this policy at annual reviews (if not earlier).
- This policy will be reviewed every three years following any legislative or operational changes in accordance with the review of other Health and Safety policies.
- The review when new noise reducing equipment is available on the market

## 8. References

- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974;
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 (amended 1999);
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992;
- The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER);
- The Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 (as amended);
- The Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996;
- The Noise Emission in the Environment by Equipment for use Outdoors Regulations 2001;
- The Pressure Systems Safety Regulations 2002;
- The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005;
- The Environmental Noise (England) Regulations 2006;
- The Supply of Machinery Regulations 2008;
- The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 2013;
- HSE Appendix 2 European Standards and Markings for Hearing Protection;
- HSE INDG 362 Noise at Work A brief guide to controlling the risks (rev 2) 2012;
- HSE INDG 363 Noise don't lose your hearing (rev 2) 2012;
- HSE Controlling Noise at Work Approved Code of Practice L108 (Second Edition) 2005;
- HSE HSG 261 Health and Safety in motor vehicle repair and associated industries (First Edition) 2009;
- HSE daily noise calculator.

## 9. Associated Documents

The policy links to: -

- Risk Assessment and Auditing Policy
- Framework for the reporting of Adverse event
- Lone Workers Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Personal Protective Equipment Policy
- Management of Road Risk Policy
- PUWER Policy
- Fire Safety Policy
- Training Policy and Training Needs Analysis

**10.0 Appendix 1**

**Management Actions**

Level of Exposure	Management actions
<p>Lower – exposure action values:</p> <p>Daily (or weekly) exposure of 80 dB (A)</p> <p>Peak sound pressure of 135 dB (C)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appoint a competent person to assess the risk to worker’s health</li> <li>• Provide employees with information and training.</li> <li>• Provide hearing protection if Requested, i.e. earmuffs or earplugs.</li> <li>• Provide health surveillance for groups at special risk.</li> <li>• Provide warning signs</li> </ul>
<p>Upper – exposure action values:</p> <p>Daily (or weekly) exposure of 85 dB (A)</p> <p>Peak sound pressure of 137 dB (C)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce exposure to as low as reasonably practicable through organisational and technical measures.</li> <li>• Provide hearing protection and ensure it is used (employees have a duty to wear the protection provided).</li> <li>• Demarcate hearing protection zones –ensure no one enters unless wearing hearing protection</li> <li>• Provide hearing surveillance.</li> </ul>
<p>*Exposure limit values:</p> <p>Daily or weekly exposure of 87 dB (A)</p> <p>Peak sound pressure of 140 dB (C)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These exposure limit values (which take account of any reduction in exposure be exceeded.</li> </ul>

\*Where the exposure of an employee to noise varies markedly from day to day, NHS 24 may use the weekly personal noise exposure in place of daily personal noise exposure



**Appendix 2 – Environmental Noise Risk Assessment - to be completed annually.**

**Name of Assessor:**

**Date of Assessment:**

<p>1. a) Are all the noise level checks up to date?</p> <p>b) Are the records up to date?</p>
<p>2. a) What is the average noise level recorded over the 6 month period?</p> <p>b) What is the noisiest area and time within the centre?</p> <p>c) What is the recorded level in this area at this time?</p> <p>d) Have any actions been put in place to reduce the noise levels?</p>
<p>3. a) Are there any other factors that may raise the level of noise in the workplace e.g. excessive conversation, noisy equipment, telephone line problems?</p> <p>b) Has this been dealt with?</p>
<p>4. a) Has any member of staff reported excessive or prolonged noise?</p> <p>b) If so what action was taken?</p>
<p>5. Has all telephony equipment been checked within the last 6 months – maintained and in a good state of repair?</p>
<p>6. Any other information that may affect this assessment?</p>

**Date of next Assessment:**

**Photocopy before use**