

Fact sheet

For trucking business owners and managers



Managing excessive noise in your business for a healthy hearing environment

Damage to hearing can occur from exposure to loud noise for a short time, or prolonged exposure to moderate noise levels. Damage is often a gradual process and it cannot be reversed.

What is excessive noise?

Noise is considered excessive when you must use a raised voice in order to be able to speak to someone at an arm's length.

The preferred solution to excessive noise exposure is to eliminate the source of the loud noise. When this is not possible or practical, the legal requirement is to minimise exposure through a hierarchy of controls:

- substitute the noise source with quieter machinery or processes
- isolate the noise source from workers
- apply engineering solutions (e.g. fit mufflers, redesign the noise source, and install noise guards or enclosures)
- apply administrative solutions (e.g. schedule noisy work for when fewest workers are present, provide signs and quiet areas for breaks), and when none of the above are reasonably practicable
- provide personal hearing protectors (e.g. ear muffs and plugs).

Barriers to effective noise control

The gradual, hidden and often uncertain course of hearing loss tends to reduce its priority as a work health and safety issue. The barriers include:

- business size (small or medium-sized businesses are less likely than large businesses to have effective noise control)
- insufficient knowledge of the effects of loud noise on hearing and hearing loss on quality of life
- belief that noise control costs too much
- a fatalistic belief that hearing loss is inevitable
- an optimistic belief that hearing loss 'will not happen to me'
- the belief that personal hearing protectors are uncomfortable and interfere with warning signals
- work cultures that are resistant to change
- the perceived stigma associated with admitting to having hearing loss

The major interventions are to:

- provide workforce education about the dangers of exposure to loud noise and the risk it poses to hearing health
- review and communicate your company's available noise control and hearing loss prevention options
- be aware of and explain to your people the importance of complying with noise control regulations, enforced by work health and safety regulatory authorities

Ways to improve the working environment

Drivers, mechanics, warehouse staff and forklift drivers can be exposed to excessive noise.

Company managers need to be proactive in ensuring the environment is safe. They might contract a professional noise audit. They might review the effectiveness of safety exclusion zones. These zones might protect people who don't see a potential hazard, but do they work for people with hearing loss?

Equally important are the attitudes of your staff, which you can try to influence. Wearing protective hearing devices, reporting potential sources of excessive noise and protecting their hearing in their private lives are actions that individuals employees can take.

But first, they must be encouraged to value their hearing and understand that a loss of hearing can hurt their employment prospects and their personal lives. It is common for people, especially males, to wait ten to fifteen years before having their hearing tested. In that time, they have missed out on fully enjoying life.

An employer can help by arranging information sessions in which a hearing health professional addresses the myths and stigma of hearing loss and conducts free hearing checks for employees, sponsored by their company.

More information

Safe Work Australia -

www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/swa/AboutSafeWorkAustralia/WhatWeDo/Publications/Pages/NS2000OccupationalNoise.aspx

Information on hearing loss and ways to address it:

http://www.deafnessforum.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=218&Itemid=271

Deafness Forum of Australia is the peak not for profit body representing the one in six Australians who are Deaf, Deafblind, Hearing Impaired or have a chronic ear disorder. www.deafnessforum.org.au

