

Noise at Work:

Protect Your Hearing

Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 — exposure limits, hearing protection zones, audiometry, employer duties and your right to quiet.

 Last reviewed: August 2026

 HSE · Noise at Work Regs 2005

 England, Scotland and Wales

ukworkrights.co.uk

In Northern Ireland, similar duties come from Northern Ireland's own health and safety law. Contact HSENI (Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland), not the HSE.

Why noise at work matters

- Noise-induced hearing loss is **permanent and irreversible** — but entirely preventable
- Around **1 million workers** in the UK are exposed to noise levels that put their hearing at risk
- High-risk industries: **construction, manufacturing, engineering, music, agriculture and mining**
- Hearing loss from noise is **gradual** — you may not notice until significant damage has occurred
- Tinnitus (ringing in the ears) is often the first sign of noise damage
- Employers must carry out a **noise risk assessment** and put controls in place
- Noise-induced hearing loss is one of the most common causes of **occupational disease claims** in the UK

▲ IT SNEAKS UP ON YOU

You don't notice noise-induced hearing loss until it's significant. By the time you notice, the damage is done. Prevention is the only solution.

The legal noise limits

LEVEL	TRIGGER	WHAT MUST HAPPEN
80 dB(A)	Lower EAV	Information, training, hearing protection available
85 dB(A)	Upper EAV	Hearing protection zones, must wear protection, audiometry
87 dB(A)	Exposure limit	Must not exceed — even with hearing protection factored in

QUICK REFERENCE

If you have to shout to be heard by someone 2 metres away — the noise level is likely above 85 dB(A) and hearing protection is required.

What you're entitled to

- **Free hearing protection** suitable for the noise level you're exposed to
- **Hearing protection zones** must be clearly marked where noise exceeds 85 dB(A)
- **Health surveillance (audiometry)** if you're regularly exposed at or above 85 dB(A)
- Right to see the results of **noise risk assessments** that affect you
- **Training and information** on the risks, controls and correct use of hearing protection
- If audiometry shows **deterioration**, your employer must review controls and consider reassignment

✓ HEARING PROTECTION — USE IT

Hearing protection only works if worn correctly and consistently. Even brief periods without protection during high-noise work can significantly increase your risk.

Frequently asked questions

Q Can I claim compensation for noise-induced hearing loss?

Yes — if your hearing loss was caused or contributed to by your employer's failure to control noise at work, you may have a personal injury claim. Time limits apply (generally 3 years from date of knowledge). Contact a solicitor specialising in occupational disease.

Q Does music in the workplace count as noise?

Yes. Music in restaurants, bars, shops and entertainment venues can reach damaging levels. The same exposure limits apply regardless of whether the noise is music or machinery. Many hospitality workers suffer noise-induced hearing loss.

Q What audiometry am I entitled to?

If regularly exposed above 85 dB(A), your employer must offer audiometric testing. This is a baseline test on first exposure, then periodic monitoring. Results are confidential. If your hearing has deteriorated, your employer must act on the findings.

Q Can I refuse to work in a noisy environment?

If adequate noise controls and hearing protection are not provided and you believe the risk is serious, you can raise the issue with your employer, safety rep or HSE. In cases of serious and imminent risk, you have the right to withdraw from the work area.

Delivery notes & attendance record

Before you start

Use the arm's-length test: if you must raise your voice to be heard two metres away, you are likely near 85 dB. Noise damage is permanent and painless until it is done.

Questions to ask the team

1. Where on our site do you have to shout to be heard?
2. Does anyone get ringing in the ears after a shift?
3. Is your hearing protection comfortable enough that you actually keep it in?
4. Could we reduce the noise at source instead of relying on PPE?

The law behind this talk

Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 (lower action value 80 dB(A), upper 85 dB(A), exposure limit 87 dB(A))

Employers must give workers comprehensible information, instruction and training on the risks they face — Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 s.2(2)(c) and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 reg. 10. Keep the record below as evidence that you did.

Attendance record

Topic

Noise at Work: Protect Your Hearing

Date

Site / location

Delivered by

Actions agreed

Next talk due

Attendees

Name

Signature

Use the Print handout button to print this record. General guidance only, not legal advice. This toolbox talk is generic material and is not a substitute for a suitable and sufficient risk assessment by a competent person. Employers remain responsible for their duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

FREE H&S GUIDANCE

Noise at Work

free guidance

Get plain-English guidance on your rights and your employer's legal duties.

HSE ADVISORY TEAM

0300 003 1747

hse.gov.uk

ACAS

0300 123 1100

acas.org.uk

CITIZENS ADVICE

0800 144 8848

citizensadvice.org.uk

UK WORK RIGHTS

Noise at Work

ukworkrights.co.uk/toolbox-noise.html

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