



# NOISE RISK ASSESSMENT - GUIDANCE ON ACTION LEVELS

The noise Action Levels are as follows:

Lower Exposure Action Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ a daily or weekly personal noise exposure of 80dB (A weighted)</li><li>➤ a peak sound pressure of 135dB (C weighted)</li></ul>
Upper Exposure Action Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ a daily or weekly personal noise exposure of 85dB (A weighted)</li><li>➤ a peak sound pressure of 137dB (C weighted)</li></ul>
Exposure Limit Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ a daily or weekly personal noise exposure of 87dB (A weighted)</li><li>➤ a peak sound pressure of 140dB (C weighted)</li></ul> <p>Exposure limit values are to take into account any hearing protection worn by the employee.</p>

# Introduction

The daily and weekly exposure levels are given as doses, which are timeweighted levels, expressed as an eight hour equivalent level. These are A-weighted levels, meaning that they are weighted to compensate for the frequency-dependent sensitivity of the human ear.

The peak levels, however, are C-weighted levels to indicate the highest level to which someone is exposed. C-weighting is a near-linear weighting, since with peak levels the potential for damage is less associated with frequency of the noise than with noise doses. It is important to note that when measuring noise, the peak level is not the same as the maximum level. A noise meter which incorporates the appropriate circuitry to deliver a peak reading must be used.

## LOWER EXPOSURE ACTION LEVEL

There is no mandatory requirement for employees to make use of hearing protection within the lower range of noise exposure levels, nor is there any obligation on the employer to make the use of hearing protection compulsory at these exposure levels. However, some employers do make the use of hearing protection compulsory within their premises at specified daily noise exposure levels that are at or below the lower exposure action level, in order to maximise the protection afforded to their employees.

Employers are required to ensure that ear protectors, issued to employees that request them, are maintained and kept in good repair at all times. Employers should also offer every encouragement to employees to request and use hearing protection in order to reduce the risk of hearing damage to the minimum. Employees should be allowed to select the type of hearing protection with which they feel most comfortable, subject to that protector affording them adequate protection against the noise to which they likely to be exposed. Employees using hearing protection must be advised of the arrangements by which they can obtain the hearing protection, and for the subsequent maintenance of the protection through replacement or repair when it is damaged or no longer effective.

It is often the case within a large factory building that the establishment of a single mandatory ear protection one – encompassing all locations and workstations where employees are likely to be subject to noise at or above the first action level – offers a better management solution than the provision of a number of discrete, smaller ear protection zones restricted to those areas with exposures at or above the second action level.



## UPPER EXPOSURE ACTION LEVEL

Where employees are subject to daily noise exposure levels at or in excess of the second action level of 85dB(A) LEP,d (daily exposure to noise at work normalised to an 8 hour day) or above, or are subject to noise at or above a peak sound pressure level of 140Pa, the employer:

- has a general duty to reduce the risk of hearing damage to the lowest level reasonably practicable
- must ensure that a noise assessment is carried out by a "competent person" to identify those employees who are subject to personal daily noise exposures at or above the second action level or to noise at or above the peak action level
- must attempt to reduce the noise exposure of those employees to the lowest level reasonably practicable by means other than the provision of personal hearing protection
- is required to provide all these employees with information, education and training about the noise levels to which they are exposed, about the risks to hearing posed by exposure to high levels of noise and about the measures available to the employees to protect themselves against the high noise levels
- must provide any employee who is subject to such daily noise exposure levels with suitable hearing protection equipment which, when properly worn, will afford adequate protection that reduces the risk of hearing damage to below that arising from exposure to noise at the second action level or the peak action level
- must define and demarcate ear protection zones in those parts of their premises where employees are likely to be exposed to noise at levels at or in excess of the second action level, or at or in excess of the peak action level; the demarcation of the area is to be made using signs conforming to that specified in the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996
- must ensure that the employees who are subject to noise exposure at or above the upper exposure action level use the hearing protection with which they are provided; in particular, they must ensure that all persons entering a designated ear protection zone wear hearing protection at all times when within the zone
- is required to ensure that the ear protectors are maintained and kept in good repair at all times.

## FREQUENCY OF ASSESSMENT

It is essential that the results of the noise assessment are kept up to date as far as is practicable. The assessment should be reviewed whenever there is significant change to the workplace, to the machinery employed, to the working practices or for any other reason that is considered to invalidate the previous assessment.

There is also the need to continually review noise control and hearing protection programmes in the workplace. It is suggested that such checks be carried out at intervals of no more than two years. Exposure to noise at work must be assessed where the noise level is likely to be at the first action level or above. If the noise levels reach the second action level, exposure should be reduced to the lowest level reasonably practicable.





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