Toolbox talk

Noise and hearing

Hearing damage is permanent, so protect it every time

10 minutes | For: Anyone working with or near noisy tools and plant

Why it matters

Noise-induced hearing loss creeps up over years and can't be cured. Tinnitus, a constant ringing, can come with it. Breakers, saws and grinders can push you over the legal limits in minutes, not hours.

Key points

1. Rule of thumb: shouting to someone 2 metres away for over 2 hours a day means about 85 dB or more.
2. At 80 dB(A) daily average your employer must assess the risk and offer hearing protection.
3. At 85 dB(A) daily/weekly exposure, control the noise and enforce protection. Mark hearing protection zones where required; peak noise matters too.
4. 87 dB(A), after hearing protection, is the legal limit. Nobody should be exposed above it.
5. Quieter tools, methods and screens come first. Hearing protection is the last line of defence.
6. Wear protection the whole time you're in the noise. Taking it off even for a few minutes considerably cuts the protection.
7. Fit earplugs properly with clean hands. Make sure muffs seal and aren't broken by glasses or hats.
8. Hearing checks are required for people regularly exposed above 85 dB(A).

Sources: HSE: Noise at work, employers' responsibilities; HSE: Assessing noise risks in construction; Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005, regulation 4.

This talk supports, but does not replace, your site-specific risk assessment, method statement, training and supervision. Free to copy and use. **tradefoxapp.com/toolbox-talks/noise**

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Do

- Wear hearing protection in every marked hearing protection zone.
- Choose low-noise tools and keep them maintained.
- Keep noisy work away from others, or warn them before you start.
- Go to your hearing checks and report any ringing or muffled hearing.
- Ask for different protection if what you have doesn't fit or is uncomfortable.

Don't

- Don't take your hearing protection off in noisy areas, even briefly.
- Don't use cotton wool or headphones as hearing protection.
- Don't reuse disposable earplugs or put them in with dirty hands.
- Don't ignore ringing in your ears after a shift. It's a warning sign.

Ask the group

- Which jobs on this site do you think are over 85 dB?
- Who has had ringing in their ears after work?
- Is your hearing protection comfortable enough to wear all shift?
- What could we do to make the noisiest jobs quieter?

If it goes wrong: If you notice ringing, muffled hearing or trouble following conversations, tell your supervisor and ask for a hearing check. Get away from the noise first and don't wait for it to get worse.

On this site

Nearest first aider _____

Emergency assembly point _____

Site-specific hazards and controls _____

_____

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Go further: Construction site PPE guide

Sources: HSE: Noise at work, employers' responsibilities; HSE: Assessing noise risks in construction; Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005, regulation 4.

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Attendance register

Noise and hearing

Site / project _____ Date and time _____

Presented by _____ Company _____

	Name (print)	Company	Signature
1			
2			
3			
4			
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11			
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13			
14			

By signing, attendees confirm they took part in this toolbox talk and understood the key points. Keep this record with your site safety file.

Presenter signature _____ Follow-up actions _____

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Go further: Construction site PPE guide

Sources: HSE: Noise at work, employers' responsibilities; HSE: Assessing noise risks in construction; Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005, regulation 4.

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Quick check

Noise and hearing

Tick one answer for each question. Your presenter has the answers.

Name _____ Date _____

1. You have to shout to someone 2 metres away for most of the day. What does that suggest?

- [ ] Noise is around 60 dB
- [ ] Noise is probably 85 dB or more
- [ ] Noise is fine

2. What is the legal exposure limit, taking hearing protection into account?

- [ ] 80 dB(A)
- [ ] 85 dB(A)
- [ ] 87 dB(A)

3. What should come first when controlling noise?

- [ ] Earplugs
- [ ] Quieter tools, methods and screens
- [ ] Working faster

4. Why does taking protection off for short spells matter?

- [ ] It doesn't
- [ ] It considerably lowers your protection
- [ ] It makes plugs last longer

5. Can noise-induced hearing loss be cured?

- [ ] Yes, with rest
- [ ] No, it's permanent
- [ ] Yes, with hearing aids

Sources: HSE: Noise at work, employers' responsibilities; HSE: Assessing noise risks in construction; Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005, regulation 4.

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For the presenter

Answers and sources

Quick check answers

1. Noise is probably 85 dB or more

HSE's rule of thumb: shouting at 2 metres for more than about 2 hours a day means the level is probably 85 dB or more.

2. 87 dB(A)

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 set the exposure limit value at 87 dB(A) daily or weekly exposure.

3. Quieter tools, methods and screens

Hearing protection is the last resort. Reducing noise at the source comes first.

4. It considerably lowers your protection

HSE says removing hearing protection for only a few minutes considerably lowers the protection you get.

5. No, it's permanent

Damage from noise is permanent. Hearing aids help, but they don't restore normal hearing.

Sources

- HSE: Noise at work, employers' responsibilities
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/employers.htm
- HSE: Assessing noise risks in construction
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/physical-ill-health-risks/assessing-noise.htm
- Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005, regulation 4
  https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/1643/regulation/4

> **Presenting tips:** keep it to about 10 minutes, use real examples from your site, ask the group questions rather than reading everything out, and record attendance on the register.

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Shouting at 2 metres? Ears on.

1. **Wear protection the whole time**
2. **Fit plugs with clean hands**
3. **Report ringing ears**

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Sources and qualifications

Noise and hearing

Scope: Great Britain safety legislation unless a nation is identified. Northern Ireland has separate legislation. Site rules can be stricter than minimum legal duties; use the site assessment, instructions and competent supervision.

A4 applicability: no installation-design requirement is asserted in this talk. Its claims are referenced to the subject-specific sources below.

S1. HSE: Employers' noise duties

80/85 dB(A) daily/weekly action values, 87 dB(A) exposure limit, peak levels, control hierarchy and hearing surveillance.

https://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/employers.htm

S2. HSE: Assessing construction noise

The 2 m/shouting/2 hour rule of thumb is a screening guide, not a measurement or safe exposure limit; key point 1 and quiz 1.

https://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/healthrisks/physical-ill-health-risks/assessing-noise.htm

S3. Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005

Exposure values, prevention, hearing protection and health surveillance duties; quiz and presenter notes.

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/1643/contents