



Occupational Health & Safety Authority

Media Release

OHSA issues Guidance on Occupational Noise

12.07.06

According to the World Health Organisation, noise-induced hearing loss is the most prevalent irreversible industrial disease. Noise is in effect a hazard that most people encounter everywhere, including at their places of work. Regrettably it is rarely given due consideration, mainly because the effects are not immediately evident and might take a long time to manifest themselves. Hearing loss may not only prevent someone from working to their full potential; it can also destroy their social life and isolate them from the community around them.

With this in mind, and following a campaign on occupational noise during the course of 2005, the Occupational Health and Safety Authority has now issued a guidance document specifically on occupational noise. The aim of this guidance is to explain in a simple and easily-comprehensible manner the concept of noise, and the health effects of exposure to high levels of noise while at the same time helping duty holders achieve compliance with their legal obligations in protecting workers' health and safety while at work.

The guidance document explains briefly the difference between noise and sound and identifies the persons who might be at risk from exposure to noise at work. The effects of noise on health are also explained briefly, including not only hearing impairment but also psychological effects such as stress and the effect on pregnant workers.

The principal obligations concerning noise at work are found in a set of regulations entitled the Work Place (Minimum Health and Safety Requirements for the Protection of Workers from Risks resulting from exposure to Noise) Regulations which will be issued in the next few days. These regulations amend and repeal the current legislation in force on occupational noise.

The guidance document clearly outlines the legal framework and explains the daily and weekly noise exposure levels of noises present at work (including impulsive noise) and the upper exposure action values at which the employer is required to take specific steps to reduce the negative effects of noise. The reader is then guided through the principles of noise reduction and control as well as to the various means of identifying noise hazards such as detailed assessments and consultation with employees.

The control of risks from noise is explained in detail and includes containment, sound insulation and absorption and enclosures. The guidance takes into consideration both existing and new machinery and installations. Particular attention is then given to one of the main principles of occupational health and safety to control risks at their source, in this case, noise.

One can also find information on hearing protection programmes and on the various ways of measuring sound, including sound level meters, microphones and noise dose meters.

Copies of this guidance document are available against a Lm 2 fee and can be collected personally from the Occupational Health and Safety Authority at 17 Edgar Ferro Street, Pieta' or by ordering a copy on 21 247 677/8 or email ohsa.communications@gov.mt

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