

# INFORMATION

## Introducing the *Approved Code of Practice for the Management of Noise in the Workplace (2002)*

The Occupational Safety and Health Service (OSH) of the Department of Labour has revised the *Approved Code of Practice for the Management of Noise in the Workplace*. The previous version (a green A4 book) was published in 1996.

The main reason for the revision is to bring the OSH approved code of practice into line with AS/NZS 1269:1998 *Occupational noise management*, published jointly by Standards Australia and Standards New Zealand.

### What are the main changes?

The main changes are:

- Recognition of AS/NZS 1269:1998 Parts 0 - 4. However, many of the changes in this standard series relate more to the practices of “competent persons”, rather than further requirements on employers in their management of noise in the workplace.
- Recognition of the “classification” or “class” method of hearing protector selection. This method supersedes the “grade” method that has been in use in New Zealand for the last twenty or so years. The “grade” method will be phased out over the next two years. The method which manufacturers use to test hearing protectors has also changed, providing a test that better takes into account the way hearing protectors are used in workplaces.
- The code recognises a new method of audiometric testing from AS/NZS 1269.4. The existing method, based on AS 1269:1989, continues to be recognised. The criteria for when noise-induced hearing loss is recognised as serious harm is unchanged.

### What are the employers' duties with respect to occupational noise?

Employers' duties with respect to hazard management of occupational noise are shown in Figure 1 of this leaflet.

Employers have three main activities to ensure they meet their duties with respect to noise under the Health and Safety In Employment Act. These are to:

- Identify hazardous noise in the workplace;
- Control hazardous noise, or failing that, to protect employees from it; and
- To arrange hearing tests for employees who work in areas with hazardous noise, and notify OSH if serious harm is detected.

### *Identifying noise hazards*

Noise hazards can be identified by means of preliminary and detailed surveys. The employer or a member of staff can carry out preliminary surveys using the checklist form on page 4 of this leaflet. This is a screening tool to see whether the noise exposure limits may be exceeded.

If a preliminary survey reveals that the noise limits could be exceeded, a detailed survey should be arranged — a “competent person” should carry this out. Information from this survey can be used to determine suitable noise control options, or the class of hearing protectors that are required.

### *Controlling noise hazards*

It is important for employers to note that the aim of the Health and Safety in Employment Act and Regulations, and the *Approved Code of Practice for the Management of Noise in the Workplace* is to reduce noise output to a level below the exposure limits stated in Regulation 11. Hearing protectors should be used either as an interim measure until control options have reduced the noise level, or where there is no other practicable means of protecting employees.

Hearing protection in the form of earmuffs or plugs is often a misused control option. If the use of hearing protectors is the only practicable means of control, it should be noted that its effectiveness in protecting employees hearing depends on:

- Selecting the correct device;
- Having a device fit an individual properly;
- The amount of time the hearing protector is actually worn while an individual is exposed to hazardous noise.

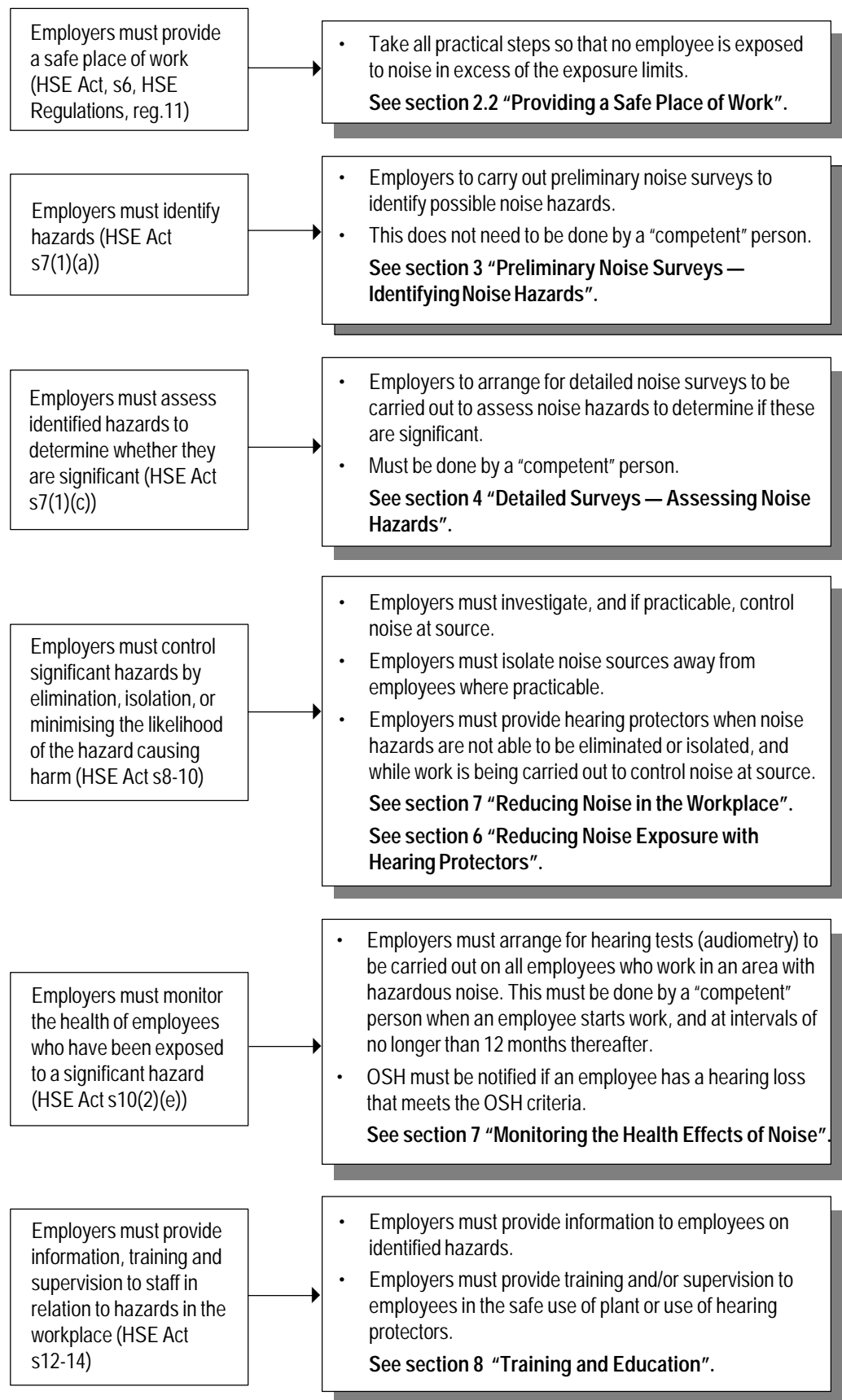
Further information on noise control is available in the *Approved Code of Practice for the Management of Noise in the Workplace*, published by OSH, or AS/NZS 1269.3.

### *Testing the hearing of workers in noise hazard areas*

If a detailed noise survey reveals noise exposure to employees greater than the exposure limits, hearing (or audiometric) tests must be arranged to determine if the exposed person has a hearing loss. These tests must also be carried out by a competent person.

If the hearing test reveals a hearing loss that equals or exceeds the OSH criteria, this must be notified to OSH as a serious harm event.

**Figure 1: Employers' duties regarding hazard management and occupational noise**



# Preliminary Noise Survey Checklist

Date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_

Assessed by: ..... Position: .....

Location of assessment: .....

**NOTE**

- The existence of any one of the following key factors indicates the need for further assessment (see Part 4 of this code).
- Some employers may not have enough information to answer questions 7 and 8.

**1** Is there difficulty in communication between two people at 1 metre distance? (Difficulty means that the speaker must raise his/her voice, or that the listener may not understand what is said.)

Yes  No

**2** Do employees in the area notice a reduction in hearing over the course of the day? (This reduction might not be noticed until after work.)

Yes  No

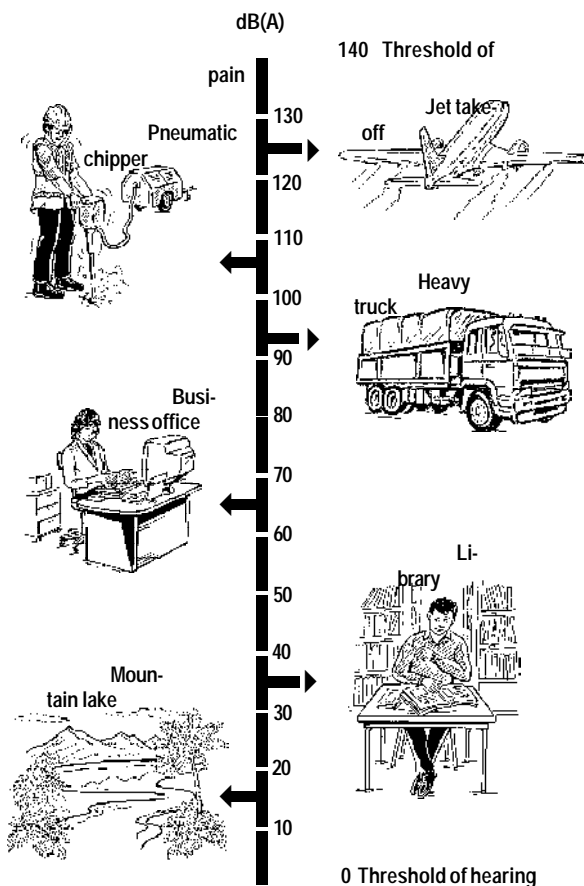
**3** Do employees experience ringing in the ears (tinnitus) or blurred/dull hearing?

Yes  No

**4** Are hearing protectors being used?

Yes  No

**Figure 2: Decibel levels of common sound**



**5** Are signs posted at the entrance to or in the work area indicating that hearing protectors should be worn?

Yes  No

**6** Does noise in any part of the workplace sound as loud as or louder than 85 dB(A) using the scale in Figure 2 below.

Yes  No

**7** Do results of past noise measurements or assessments indicate noise levels equal or greater than any of the following?:

(a) 85 dB(A) "Slow" or "Fast" response

Yes  No

(b) 85 dB(A)  $L_{Aeq,T}$  (See Note 1) (or  $L_{eq}$ )

Yes  No

(c) 80 dB(A) Sound Power Level

Yes  No

**8** Does any equipment have noise information including labels that indicate noise levels equal to or greater than any of the following?

(a) 80 dB(A)  $L_{Aeq,T}$  (or  $L_{eq}$ )

Yes  No

(b) 130 dB Peak (unweighted)

Yes  No

(c) 80 dB(A) Sound Power level (See Note 2)

Yes  No

**9** Do the results of the audiometry indicate that any past or present employees have a hearing loss due to noise?

Yes  No

**10** Have there been any industrial deafness claims?

Yes  No

**Notes:**

1. For a variety of reasons, the  $L_{Aeq,T}$  quoted may underestimate noise levels that actually result.
2. Sound Power Level is not a noise level. For example, under some circumstances equipment generating a sound power level of 80 dB(A) may result in a noise level of 85 dB(A) or higher.