

## MODULE 7: NOISE POLICY

**THIS MODULE IS FOR** Chief executive officer  
Noise manager  
Other managers  
Production/engineering staff  
Employee representatives  
OHS committee.

**PURPOSE** The purposes of this module are to:

- encourage the organisation to develop a written noise policy;
- suggest points the policy should address;
- suggest ways of developing the policy.

**OUTCOMES** With the help of this module, the organisation should be able to develop a written comprehensive noise policy.

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## DEVELOPING A NOISE POLICY FOR YOUR WORKPLACE

### WHAT IS A NOISE POLICY?

A noise policy is a document laying down the general rules the organisation intends to follow in dealing with its noise problems. The most serious of these problems is the presence of hazardous noise (sufficient to cause hearing damage) in working areas. Noise can, of course, cause problems even when it does not pose a threat to hearing (for example, it can create difficulties in communication or concentration in office areas or provoke complaints from the organisation's neighbours) but these problems are outside the scope of this module.

The preparation of this module was facilitated by reference to the noise control policy developed by the Noise Management Team at BP Refinery (Kwinana) Pty Ltd., Western Australia.

### PURPOSES OF A NOISE POLICY

The organisation's noise control goals should be specified, for example:

#### SPECIFY GOALS

- to ensure that no employee's 8-hour average noise exposure level ( $L_{Aeq,8h}$ ) exceeds 90 dB(A) in 1997 and 85 dB(A) by 2000; and
- to ensure that no employee is exposed to impulse noise with a level exceeding 140 dB (Unweighted) Peak.

#### SPECIFY PREFERRED CONTROL METHODS

Preferred methods of controlling risk should be specified, for example:

- Wherever workable, noise levels of existing plant will be reduced by engineering means to achieve the above goals.
- Where it is not immediately possible to reach goals by engineering means, exposure duration will be restricted.

- The wearing of personal hearing protectors may be necessary as an interim measure.
- Noise limits will be specified for new plant and equipment so that noise levels in working areas are progressively reduced to the point where hearing protectors are unnecessary.

DETAIL  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
ARRANGEMENTS

Arrangements for achieving the specified goals should be detailed, for example:

- A member of management will be appointed noise manager to oversee and coordinate the noise management programme.
- A noise working group, including employee and/or employee representatives, will be set up to help develop the noise control programme.
- An ongoing information and training programme about noise and its effects, noise control and personal hearing protection will be organised for managers, supervisors and workers.
- Following a preliminary noise audit, a noise consultant will be called in to advise on noise control options.

DEFINE  
RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibilities of managers, supervisors and employees should be stated, for example:

- Managers are responsible for organising the noise programme in areas under their control, preparing budget estimates for noise control and ensuring that their staff receive adequate information and training.
- Supervisors are responsible for monitoring the day-to-day operation of the noise programme, ensuring that purchase requests for equipment and power tools specify the quietest workable item, monitoring the use and condition of noise control devices and hearing protectors and maintaining relevant records.
- Employees are responsible for attending noise information and training sessions, using noise control equipment and personal hearing protectors

where necessary and reporting equipment defects and problems to supervisors. Employees are invited to nominate for membership of the noise committee and to participate in the development of the noise control programme.

## **BENEFITS OF A NOISE POLICY**

In addition to the major points listed above, a well thought out noise policy can serve a number of other purposes, including the following:

- Noise has been a feature of the industrial scene for so long that it tends to be accepted as an inevitable part of many jobs. This attitude needs to be challenged. A noise policy that sets definite noise control goals will create such a challenge and put noise “on the agenda” of relevant groups in the organisation.
- A noise policy helps integrate the noise programme with the rest of the organisation’s operations. If noise is made a specialised area, it is in danger of being regarded as the province only of specialists. On the other hand, if “think quiet” and “buy quiet” are fully integrated into the organisation’s operations, they stand a better chance of success.
- The process of working out a noise policy can help identify areas where arrangements need to be made for coordination (for example, budgeting for noise control needs to be integrated with overall budgeting; a system is needed to keep the noise manager informed of proposed equipment purchases).
- A forward-looking policy, especially one that gives clear priority to workable engineering controls, provides the strongest support for the introduction of personal hearing protection. Employees are more likely to cooperate in a personal protection programme if they can see there are plans to progressively reduce noise to non-hazardous levels.
- The declaration of management commitment, embodied in a noise policy, helps create a positive health and safety climate in the organisation.
- It is a basic reference point for planning and for noise information and training programmes within the organisation.

- It promotes good industrial relations by acknowledging the value of employee participation and ideas.

**FACTORS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT**

The major factors that need to be considered in developing a noise policy are:

- the organisation's legal obligations under the Health and Safety in Employment Act and Health and Safety in Employment Regulations;
- the resources (for example, technical expertise and finances) at the organisation's disposal;
- any occupational health and safety policies and/or agreements with employees or their representatives already in place in the organisation;
- the costs, benefits and effectiveness of various options (see *Modules 6: Costs/Benefits* and *Module 9: Evaluating Options*).

**SPECIFIC ISSUES THAT MAY BE DEALT WITH**

Some key issues, such as setting a noise exposure standard and adopting a "buy quiet" purchasing policy, were mentioned above. Other points that may need to be covered, again with examples of possible policy statements, are given below.

**Noise control in temporary work sites**

Any temporary work site shall be suitably located or screened to ensure that noise levels generated do not adversely affect employees' hearing. If necessary, entry to such sites shall be restricted to personnel wearing appropriate graded hearing protectors.

**Design of new work areas**

New work areas shall be designed and laid out so that employee noise exposure is maintained at the lowest workable level.

**Purchasing of new plant and equipment**

Noise emission will in future be an important factor in the selection of new plant and equipment. So far as is workable, the quietest available item shall be favoured for purchase.

**Warning signs**

Working areas and equipment requiring the use of hearing protectors shall be clearly identified by appropriate signs or labels.

**Maintenance**

All noise control fixtures (for example, seals, vibration mounts and silencers) will be regularly inspected and maintained to ensure that noise emission is kept to a minimum. Training sessions in basic noise control will be organised for maintenance staff.

**Work procedures to reduce exposure**

Work procedures will be designed to minimise noise emission and ensure that as few people as possible are exposed to high levels of noise.

**Protection of contractors and visitors**

Contractors and visitors to the organisation shall comply with the noise control and personal hearing protection procedures prescribed for employees.

**Employees visiting elsewhere**

Employees working at other employers' premises (for example, carrying out maintenance work) shall comply with noise control procedures in operation there and use hearing protectors if necessary.

**Audiometry**

Audiometric (hearing) testing shall be offered to employees according to the requirements of the Health and Safety in Employment Act. Each employee shall be provided with a record of his or her test results. Release of the test results to other persons shall be in accordance with the legal requirements.

**Budgeting**

Estimates of the amount of funds necessary for the implementation of this policy shall be included in the organisation's budget each year with a view to ensuring progressive reduction and, where possible, ultimate elimination of noise hazards.

**Regular review of policy**

This policy shall be reviewed annually, at which time suggestions for improvement will be invited from all interested persons.

## **DEVELOPING THE ORGANISATION'S NOISE POLICY**

It is essential that senior management is involved in the development of the organisation's noise policy and is committed to seeing it put into effect. The reasons are that:

### MANAGEMENT

- top management controls the working environment and is legally responsible for controlling any hazards it contains;
- top management has the final say in the allocation of funds and other resources and therefore effectively controls the extent to which the policy is put into practice;
- experience and research shows that top management support is vital to the success of noise control programmes.

### EMPLOYEES

Requirements that employees be consulted in the development of health and safety policies and systems are now part of the Health and Safety in Employment Act. The reasons for this are:

- a policy is much more likely to be accepted and followed if the people it affects have a say in developing it;
- it is likely to be more relevant and effective because of the direct input of those affected.

There are other reasons for consulting employees and involving them in the development of an organisation's noise policy. They have an intimate knowledge of the machines and work practices that create noise, and are usually an excellent source of ideas for possible control methods. Even when solutions are proposed by others, such as noise consultants or contractors, it is important to seek the views of employees before installation to check that work flow and maintenance access will not be adversely affected.

### USING THE POLICY

Once the noise policy is completed, don't file it away, but:

- post it on notice boards to inform those concerned and demonstrate the organisation's commitment to employees' health and safety;

- use it in training new managers, supervisors and operators in their responsibilities;
- use it to promote the organisation's image;
- mention it when job vacancies are being advertised to attract good-quality staff;
- use it as a reference when developing other OHS policies;
- have it on hand when a health and safety inspector calls to show what the organisation is doing to meet its legal obligations.

**FURTHER  
READING**

Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Commission of Western Australia, *A Code of Practice for Noise Control in the Workplace*, Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Commission of Western Australia, Perth, 1989.

WorkCover, South Australia, *Managing Health and Safety at Work*, WorkCover, South Australia, Adelaide, 1989. (Also released by WorkCover Authority of NSW, Sydney, 1989).

Occupational Health and Safety Authority of Victoria, *Code of Practice for Noise, No 17, 1 October 1992*, Occupational Health and Safety Authority, Victoria, Australia.

Occupational Safety and Health Service, NZ, *Approved Code of Practice for the Management of Noise in the Workplace*, Occupational Safety and Health Service, Department of Labour, New Zealand.