

**MINUTES OF THE 12TH MEETING OF THE ENGINEERING INDUSTRY
NOISE TASK GROUP ON 20TH MAY 2003 AT HSE'S ROSE COURT
OFFICE, LONDON**

Attendees

Richard Griffiths – Manufacturing Technologies Association
John Hustwick – Industrial Noise and Vibration Centre
Bob Hanlon – EEF West Midlands
Clare Broadbent – Corus
Martin Bevan – GMB (chair of meeting)
Brian Owen – British Turned Parts Manufacturers Association
Tim Ward – HSE
Graham Watson – HSE
David Allison – Marine Painting Forum
Andie Michael - HSE

Apologies

Gary Booton – EEF
Tony McCarthy – National Union of Domestic Appliances & General Operatives Union
Peter Scott – Jungheinrich UK Ltd
Colin Holdhusen and David Frost – Corus
Peter Wilson - INVC
Marjory Mitchell – HSE

Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

Matters arising from the minutes not on the agenda

Martin Bevan circulated the winter edition of the GMB Centrepoint publication containing an article written by him discussing how small and medium sized enterprises can reduce the risk from noise at work. A copy of the article is enclosed.

EINTG membership

A number of membership changes were outlined including: Richard Brown has retired from the Federation of British Engineers' Tool Manufacturers and has been replaced by Mr Markham; David Jeffery has left Rolls-Royce and has been replaced by Neil Woodward and Rebecca Hathaway has left HSE. Nigel Day the product manager for hearing protection at uvex UK Ltd, had contacted Graham Watson to offer assistance to the EITNG. The offer was appreciated and it was agreed an input from the supply side would be beneficial. However, it was felt more appropriate to arrange this via the Personal Safety Manufacturers Association, which represents suppliers of ear protection. Tim Ward agreed to look further into this.

Action: Tim Ward

A further approach to The Royal National Institute for the Deaf regarding they becoming members of the Task Group had been postponed until the work of

the Task Group was at a more advanced stage. As final permission has now been given to produce a toolbox talk pack for noise and agreement has been reached on how to make EITNG guidance sheets available to a wider audience, it was felt that it was now a more appropriate time to further progress this issue.

Action: Graham Watson

The Engineering and Utilities Sector

The EINTG was originally established by HSE'S Engineering and Utilities Sector, to which the EINTG's mission statement and terms of reference also refer. Following a Sector review the Engineering and Utilities Sector has been split and the Engineering part amalgamated into a Manufacturing Sector. Other industries also belonging to the Manufacturing Sector include rubber, plastics, textiles, paper, printing and foundries. As they all have processes generating high noise levels there are merits in expanding the EINTG to cover all manufacturing. However, it was agreed to postpone detailed discussions on this until the final operating structure of the Sector has been finalised. A paper will be circulated to members prior to the next meeting outlining the new sector structure and seeking members' views of the implications for the EINTG.

Action: Graham Watson

Statistics for noise induced deafness

The 2001 statistics (on the HSE web site at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/noise.htm>) updated those discussed at the last meeting. The number of awards for industrial injury benefit payment for noise-induced deafness has increased from 226 in 2000 to 263 although is still well below those seen in 1997 and earlier. Of the new cases qualifying for benefit 10% are from shipbuilding and repair and 47% are in the occupation group of skilled metal and electrical trades. Occupations identified from data compiled by the Occupational Surveillance Scheme for Audiologists as having higher rates of hearing loss include: foundry labourers, metal plate workers, shipwrights and riveters, printers, machine tool operatives, tool makers and fitters and builders. A high proportion of the new cases arose in engineering, the presence of printing confirming the potential merit of expanding the work of the Task Group to cover all manufacturing.

It was reported that the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council recently reviewed the requirement to have 50dB hearing loss in both ears to qualify for compensation for noise-induced deafness. The TUC wished this lowered to 44dB representing a 14% disability, at which most other illnesses become compensatable. While the IAC agreed in their report *Occupational Deafness* (ISBN 0101567227, The Stationary Office, £10.50) that “.. in logic and fairness, the threshold should be 14%” they were unable to recommend this because of the quality of contemporary evidence. Instead they will continue to monitor existing research.

HSE Noise programme

Instead of HSE Inspectors raising the issue of noise as part of an HSE priority programme it has now to be addressed only where it is a matter of evident concern. In such cases inspectors are asked to rate the employers performance in 3 key areas: management of noise, control of noise at source and ear protection. A score of 4 indicates either limited or no compliance. For the weeks 1 to 47 (starting April 2002) noise was selected as an issue on 8324 occasions, felt not to be present on 10941 occasions and was not discussed on 9733 occasions. Of the visits made where noise was discussed, it is not known what proportion was made prior to the change from a priority programme to a matter of evident concern. A total of 320 scores of 4 had been recorded and 142 Enforcement Notices issued. Data was not available for individual industries. Data for the end of the work year will be provided for the next Task Group meeting.

Action: Graham Watson

Research into the use of ear protection

The research report produced by the Institute of Occupational Medicine exploring people's attitudes to wearing hearing protection was discussed (the full report is on the HSE web site at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrpdf/rr028.pdf> , its summary, conclusion and recommendations are attached). The research involved identifying and evaluating key worker attitudes and limitations in the companies' hearing conservation programmes. From this interventions designed to improve the use of ear protection were drawn up and implemented in 4 of the workplaces. In some workplaces ear protection was not worn despite the employer having apparently provided training in their use. This suggests the need for a package of measures including training validation, refresher training and a high degree of supervision. Such a package of measures was felt by those present to be frequently missing from workplaces. The problems in identifying, marking and enforcing ear protection zones where noise levels are variable throughout the day or where the noise sources are transient were discussed. This was felt to be a difficult issue, one again best addressed by a package of measures including education, training and supervision.

The research identified that the issue was not one of ear protection being unable to protect the wearer but one of it not being worn correctly. The issue of overprotection was raised where people can feel isolated. Ear protection is available which can address this, where there is felt to be a particular risk i.e. due to a possible failure to hear warning alarms etc. The GMB are undertaking work involving letters being sent to contractors in the Local Authority Sector advising that if they or their employees break a health and safety rule whilst on site their payments will be reduced. They are also involved in a Good Neighbour type scheme, involving going down the supply chain to what are mainly small and medium sized enterprises. Training can be a significant cost for firms of this size particularly if it involves taking a large proportion of their employees off the factory floor. Difficulties created by shift work were also discussed. It was also felt important that noise should be seen as part of an integrated health and safety issue. For employees to make

better use of ear protection a change in culture is needed although this could be costly to achieve, concern was expressed regarding whether SMEs could afford it.

The research identified the benefits of involving employees in the active selection of ear protection undertaken as part of a toolbox talk on noise. The talks covering a number of issues including basic noise awareness, practical demonstration of the effects of noise-induced deafness and the legal duties of employers. For this training to be effective however, those delivering it also required training.

EINTG guidance

The toolbox talk working party has now met twice, thanks was expressed to those members who have taken part. Since the last meeting it has been agreed to broaden the scope of the pack to cover all manufacturing. HSE's publication section has also approved the business case for producing the pack either as a priced publication or as a free pack if additional funding can be found for it. The pack will consist of a CD already produced by HSE's Textile's Sector Group which simulates the effects of noise-induced deafness, the existing free HSE employers and employees leaflets, the existing ear protection poster, briefing sheets and trainers notes, which Martin Bevan has agreed to draft. It is proposed that when a draft version of the pack is available that it will be trialled in the Midland Region with the help of the GMB and EEF West Midlands. It is also proposed that the pack form the basis of a campaign focusing on the use of ear protection involving employers and employees collectively signing up to promoting the improved use of ear protection. The 2005 or 2006 European Week for Safety and Health may focus on exposure to noise in the workplace, the possibility of running a campaign to tie in with this was discussed.

The two draft information sheets produced by Peter Wilson were discussed. Issues raised included the causes of noise shorts, the importance of maintenance as a control measure, the impact of where a process is located and the relationship between the ranked sources of noise and the overall noise levels. It was agreed that the sheets were though intended as a simple straightforward guide to noise control and that it was not possible for them to cover all relevant issues. The sheets are also being circulated internally in HSE for further comment. Thanks were extended to Peter Wilson for drafting the sheets.

The information sheet drafted by Tim Ward and Bob Hanlon "Noise assessments – the good the bad and the ugly" was also discussed. This was intended to act as a starting point by helping people to identify what should be included in a noise assessment and to help engage noise consultants. Feedback was particularly requested on the usefulness of rating assessments according to whether they were adequate, more than adequate or first rate. The issue of providing detailed calculations showing the adequacy of ear protectors was discussed, whilst such data can be helpful it is important it is not excessive. The data can be used to identify if there is overprotection which is defined in BS EN 458:1993 *Hearing protection – Recommendations*

for selection, use, care and maintenance – Guidance Document as being 15 dB or more below 90dB.

It was felt that some small employers may look at the adequate noise assessment and ask why should they do more. However, while a noise assessment does not need to identify control measures a lot of consultants are also noise control engineers and can provide added value. A key point raised by the sheet is that a noise assessment is meant to lead onto further action and not be simply filed away. Tim Ward agreed to amend the sheet to further explain why employers should aim for an assessment that was more than adequate.

Action: Tim Ward

HSE web site

Due to problems in securing funding for an independent web site it was proposed that guidance produced by the Task Group be placed on HSE's web site. Permission had already been obtained for this. While the EINTG already has a web page on the web site it was felt more beneficial if any guidance of a general nature produced by the Task Group was placed instead on the HSE noise web page. This would make the guidance more accessible to a wider audience. The HSE noise web page has a link to the EINTG web page. Members expressed support for the above proposal. Permission had been obtained to reproduce a number of case studies from HSE'S Sound Solutions publication as a means of populating an independent web site. As this was no longer going ahead it has instead been agreed that the case studies can be reproduced on the HSE noise web page. It is intended to have a table summarising each of the case studies and highlighting those of wider relevance. Links will be created from the table to the individual case studies.

EU Funding for SME's

Details of the funding available was e-mailed to members in April, the only response received was that funding could be sought to emulate the Workwell programme. Martin Bevan reported that from experience managing this type of project can be very difficult due to the need to carry out evaluation, meet performance indicators etc. As the deadline for applications was approaching fast it was therefore agreed not to pursue with an application this year. As the funding is available on an annual basis it was agreed to keep the issue on the agenda for the next meeting to discuss making an application at a future date. This could for example be tied in with a Noise European Week of Safety and Health.

The HSE Good Neighbour Scheme was identified as a possible alternative to emulating the Workwell project, as a means of progressing the noise issue at a local level. There was also the Inside UK Enterprise Scheme to which HSE had bought into. Use could also perhaps be made of the Safety Awareness Days that HSE is currently running. Graham Watson agreed to look into the above possibilities and to report back to the Task Group.

Action: Graham Watson

Supply of machinery

Details of a proposed supply side initiative focusing on noise were outlined. The initial focus will be on power presses, punch presses and metal cutting saws, which have been identified as important sources of noise exposure above 90 dB(A). Suppliers/manufacturers of these machines will be asked to benchmark themselves against set criteria in relation to noise control at source and the supply of noise emission data. It is intended to work with the Manufacturing Technologies Association and the Metalforming Machinery Makers Association to progress this issue, including holding joint seminars for their members. It is anticipated that the initiative will last for up to 5 years. It was felt that the Machinery Directive allowed some leeway regarding how noise emission data is obtained, as a result data from different machinery suppliers may not necessarily be comparable. The incentive for manufacturers to produce quieter machinery was discussed, it was felt that pressure for this would come from HSE and machine users although the latter may require education and motivation.

Implementation of the Physical Agents (Noise) Directive

The Directive has to be implemented by 15/02/2006. A draft Consultative Document containing the new regulations will be published in March 2004, replies to be received by June 2004. Information on any further developments will be available via the HSE Noise web page. The issue of beyond normal working hours was discussed, this was felt by HSE to mean overtime and not to involve extending employers' responsibilities out with a work environment. Under the requirement to do a risk assessment employers will need to consider other relevant issues such as any pastimes that their employees are known to have which exposes them to loud noise. Employers will not however be expected to control what their employees do when they are not at work.

Audiometry can be used to identify employees who have worse hearing than would be expected, if the employer has the necessary controls in place then this could potentially help in any resulting civil claims. The issue of susceptible individuals who may have a hearing loss not explained by their work activity was also raised. There is also evidence that young people do have worsening hearing, which raises the importance of baseline audiograms.

Dates and venues of next meetings

21st October 2003 HSE, No 1 Hagley Road, Birmingham

16th April 2004 EEF West Midlands, Birmingham (to be confirmed)