

Health Surveillance for Noise Induced Hearing Loss

Health Effects of Noise Exposure

- Noise Induced Hearing Loss – permanent, irreversible
- Tinnitus
- May also affect performance, communication & audibility of safety/warning signals

Noise Induced Hearing Loss

- Hearing loss caused by work is a significant occupational disease
- Recent research indicates 170,000 people suffer from hearing damage due to noise at work
- Factors contributing to damage include the intensity of noise and length of exposure

Health Surveillance

- Specific regulation (reg 9) for health surveillance
- HSE guidance specifies risk at 85dB
- Employers need to provide health surveillance for all workers regularly exposed above 85dB

What is Health Surveillance for NIHL?

- Health surveillance is ‘audiometry’
- This is a method of ‘hearing checks’ which measures the sensitivity of hearing over a range of sound frequencies
- This is done by presentation of pure tones to each ear at specific frequencies

Issues for new guidance for health surveillance



- When will it be required
 - all those regularly exposed above 85dB
 - Only for susceptible individuals if requested between 80 and 85dB
- Who should conduct the testing
 - Any person with appropriate training
 - referral to a doctor when problem identified
 - referral facilitated by categorisation scheme

The health surveillance provider – what to expect



- **Should** be designated person in charge of HS programme
 - Occupational physician, or nurse with specialist training in audiometry, or audiologist.
- Person conducting test
 - as a minimum, appropriate training so that testing is carried out in a repeatable and accurate manner.
 - training syllabus by the British Society of Audiology
 - HSE likely to develop syllabus independently

Changes to current guidance

- Reflects changes in legislation
- Improvement to current categorisation scheme – simpler & easier to use/interpret
- Included as a chapter within main guidance so that everybody has access to the information

HSE Categorisation Scheme



Category	Action
<p><u>1. ACCEPTABLE HEARING ABILITY</u></p> <p>Hearing within normal limits</p>	None
<p><u>2. MILD HEARING IMPAIRMENT</u></p> <p>May indicate developing NIHL</p>	Warning
<p><u>3. POOR HEARING</u></p> <p>Suggests significant NIHL</p>	Referral
<p><u>4. RAPID HEARING LOSS</u></p> <p>Reduction in hearing level of 30 dB or more, within 3 years or less.</p>	Referral

Frequency of Health surveillance

- Baseline assessment
- Annual for 2 years
- 3 yearly thereafter, unless cause for concern

Other Health Issues for RA

- Within RA reg (5) requirement to consider interactions between noise and ototoxic subs and noise and vibration
- Likely to be guidance on ototoxic subs of concern on website
- Otherwise employers just need to note these mixed exposures and monitor effects through HS