

Facilities Management from A to Z



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Very little work is carried out in complete silence. From the roar of heavy machinery or the hubbub of a busy call centre to the gentle murmur of solicitors' office, noise is constantly in the background. In many instances it's nothing to worry about. But in others - when the length of exposure to certain noise levels is exceeded or when one-off noises (peaks) are particularly loud - it can cause health and other problems to employees, visitors and members of the public.

In these circumstances there is a legal requirement to assess the risks of noise and to take steps to control noise above fixed action levels. Facility managers need to be aware of noise impacts on staff, neighbours and the FM team itself. Under environmental legislation people may be able to make a noise-related complaint of statutory nuisance against the organisation. Noise pollution complaints are usually dealt with by local authority environmental health departments.

The risks posed by noise should be covered by the overall assessment of health and safety risks and environmental concerns. An assessment of workplace noise should be carried out by a competent person and should identify the sources of possible noise hazards, determine who is at risk and work out the daily personal noise exposure levels of employees.

If anyone has a daily personal noise exposure level at, or above, 80 decibels a noise risk assessment must be carried out and the actual level of noise exposure assessed. Information and training about noise risk must be provided along with hearing protection equipment for those who request it.

If the daily personal noise exposure level is 85 decibels or above steps must be taken to reduce exposure and hearing protection supplied to affected workers. Management must ensure that such equipment is properly used and maintained and identify the area as a hearing protection zone. Health surveillance checks and record should be maintained for workers frequently exposed to above 85 decibels. Employees should not be exposed to noise levels above 87 decibels. This exposure limit value takes account of any reduction in exposure provided by hearing protection.

There is a lot of useful information on noise at work on the HSE website www.hse.gov.uk/noise