Policy

Guideline

Hearing and Noise Management (WHS)

Objective file number: 2015/05842
Document classification: For Official Use Only -I2-A2
Policy developed by: Workforce Health, People and Culture
Approved at Portfolio Executive on: 5 April 2016
Next review due: 30 April 2019

Summary
The Policy Guideline provides guidance in the control of workplace noise and the reduction of noise related health affects amongst SA Health workers, students and visitors, ensuring compliance with Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (SA), its regulations and codes of practice.

Keywords

Policy history
Is this a new policy? Y
Does this policy amend or update an existing policy? N
Does this policy replace an existing policy? N
If so, which policies? N/A

Applies to
All SA Health Portfolio

Staff impact
All Staff, Management, Admin, Students; Volunteers

EPAS Compatible
NA

Registered with Divisional Policy Contact Officer
Yes

Policy doc. Reference No.
G0158

Version control and change history

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1. Objective

SA Health is committed to and acknowledges its legislative responsibility for the provision of a safe work environment and the prevention of harm to all workers and other persons working within or visiting SA Health sites.

The policy guideline outlines the requirements defined by the Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (SA) and its regulations for all SA Health Local Health Networks (LHN)/Health Service (HS)/Business Unit (BU) and Contractors (PCBU) to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the potential for exposure to noise that can contribute to hearing loss is eliminated or risk mitigated.

This policy guideline provides information on how noise affects hearing, how to identify and assess exposure to noise and how to control health and safety risks arising from hazardous noise.

This policy guideline is to be read in conjunction with SA Health Policy Directive – High Risk Work Safety (WHS) and SA Health Policy Directive - Hazard Identification and Risk Management (WHS) and is prepared with reference to regulatory requirements set out in the Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012 (SA) and the following approved SafeWork Australia Codes of Practice:

- How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks;
- Managing Noise and Preventing Hearing Loss at Work.

2. Scope

The policy guideline applies to all SA Health workers including occupiers, contractors, volunteers, labour hire personnel and students; and to all SA Health workplaces where there is the potential for exposure to noise that can contribute to hearing loss.

3. Principles

SA Health will take reasonably practicable steps to develop and implement a systematic and consistent approach to hazard identification and risk management, ensuring that workers and other persons are not exposed to health and safety risks arising from noise in the workplace.

To assist in the control of workplace noise and the reduction of noise related health affects amongst SA Health workers, students and visitors, SA Health LHN / HS / BU / WPs must manage the risks of hearing loss associated with the exposure to excessive noise at the workplace, including:

- ensuring that the noise a worker is exposed to at the workplace does not exceed the exposure standard for noise (85dB(A) per day);
- providing audiometric testing to a worker who is frequently required to use personal hearing protection as a control measure for hearing loss associated with noise that exceeds the exposure standard.
4. Detail

4.1 Health Effects

Noise induced hearing loss is a serious occupational disease and entails substantial economic costs. To the individual, it means communication difficulties, impairment of personal relationships, social isolation and degradation in the quality of life.

Hazardous noise affects the functioning of the inner ear, which may cause temporary or even permanent hearing loss. The degree of permanent hearing loss that occurs is dependent on how loud the noise is and the length of exposure. Repeated or prolonged exposure to loud sounds increases the risk of hearing damage, and the effects are cumulative (commonly referred to as Cumulative Noise Exposure (CNE)).

Permanent hearing loss can also occur suddenly if a person is exposed to very loud impact or explosive sounds. This type of damage is known as acoustic trauma.

Common causes of hearing loss in the workplace include:
- Machinery and plant operation (e.g. Ambulance sirens)
- Falling objects from heights
- Hand-arm vibration through portable equipment operation (e.g. orthopaedics)
- Exposure to chemicals (e.g. Ototoxic substances)
- Unexpected loud noises occurring during telephone headset use (known as acoustic shock).

4.2 Managing the Risks

Appropriate risk control measures must be taken if a worker is exposed to noise levels that:
- exceed 8 hour pressure level equivalent of 85 dB(A) per day, or
- peak pressure levels greater than 140 dB(C).

Peak noise levels greater than 140 dB(C) usually occur with impact or explosive noise, for example a gun shot. Any exposure above this peak can create almost instant damage to hearing.

The exposure to noise is taken to be that measured at the workers ear position without taking into account any protection, which may be afforded by personal hearing protectors.

The Code of Practice - Managing Noise and Preventing Hearing Loss at Work provides guidance on how to manage the risks of hearing loss associated with noise by following a systematic process that involves:
- identifying sources of noise that may cause or contribute to hearing loss,
- if necessary, assessing the risks associated with these hazards,
- implementing risk control measures
- reviewing risk control measures.

Noise exposure can be reduced via a variety of different risk control methods. As with other hazards, the risk control methods should be selected in accordance with the "hierarchy of controls" outlined below:
1. Eliminate the hazard by eliminating the source of the noise;
2. Minimise the risk through engineering noise controls or substitution of noisy equipment (e.g. fitting silencers, isolating a vibrating noise source);
3. Implement administrative controls by removing workers from noisy areas or arranging to produce noise at times when there are few or no other staff present to minimise the number of staff affected;
4. Provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as supplying ear plugs, ear muffs accompanied by an effective education and training programme.

Guidance on the general risk management process is available in the Code of Practice: How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks.

4.3 Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment

Hazard identification and risk assessment of all excessive noise in the workplace must be conducted in accordance with SA Health Policy Directive – Hazard Identification and Risk Management (WHS).

Noise hazards can be identified through:
- Regular worksite safety inspections;
- Discussions with workers;
- Information from the manufacturer or suppliers of plant and equipment;
- Incident and injury data.

When a noise hazard is reported or identified, a preliminary noise hazard assessment should be conducted in consultation with workers and health and safety representatives to assist in identifying if there are any noise processes and tasks that require a more formal risk assessment.

Reference may be made to SA Health WHSIM Form – Noise Hazard Identification Checklist (FOR033) to assist in this process.

A risk assessment must be conducted when an identified noise hazard is unable to be immediately eliminated or reduced to below the standard required.

The risk assessment will assist in:
- identifying which workers are most at risk of potential hearing loss due to excessive noise exposure
- determining the source of noise and risk
- determining the noise risk control measure(s) to implement
- review the effectiveness of existing control measures

A risk assessment may not always need noise level measurement, for example, where the manufacturer has provided information about the machine’s noise levels when it is operated in particular ways, then a sufficient assessment can be made without measurement.

Any implemented noise control measure must be reviewed to ensure that it remains adequate and if modifications are required, then it should be done immediately to minimise any potential risks to workers.

It is recommended that the noise related risk assessment is undertaken by a competent person who has experience and knowledge of the WHS Regulations for noise i.e. WHS business unit professional.
Reference may be made to the SA Health risk assessment templates page to access generic risk assessment templates that should be used to assess the risk of noise hazards identified in the workplace.

Where a noise related risk assessment determines that the source is unable to be controlled effectively and the noise level remains above the standard, the WHS business unit professional in consultation with the LHN/HS/BU manager will determine whether a detailed noise assessment will be required.

4.4 Detailed Noise Assessment

A detailed noise assessment will be required by a competent person should identified activities or environments expose workers or other persons at your workplace to hazardous noise which cannot be effectively reduced below the standard.

The LHN/HS WHS business unit professional may be able to arrange an initial test of noise levels through use of a personal noise dosimeter or an internal Audiology unit (where available), which will assist to determine the requirement for a detailed noise assessment.

Where a detailed noise assessment is required, the LHN/HS WHS business unit professional will assist the business unit manager in arranging this. The service provider selected should be a competent person* i.e. Occupational Hygienist, that specialises in noise exposure management.

Reference may be made to AS/NZS 1269.1 Occupational Noise Management - Measurement and assessment of noise immission and exposure for further guidance.

External noise assessments should be reviewed and reassessed every five years or earlier if changes in the workplace occur that affect the noise level.

* Competent person – Refer to definitions section

4.5 Personal Hearing Protector (PHP)

Personal hearing protectors (PHP), such as ear-muffs or ear-plugs, must be used in the following circumstances:

• when the risks arising from exposure to noise cannot be eliminated or minimised by other more effective control measures,
• as an interim measure until other control measures are implemented;
• where extra protection is needed above what has been achieved using other noise control measures.

When engineering and administrative noise control measures do not reduce the exposure to noise to or below the exposure standard, workers must be supplied with, and wear, effective PHP. Workers should be consulted in the selection process of PHP and be offered a reasonable choice of range.

Personal hearing protectors should be selected and maintained in accordance with AS/NZS 1269.3 Occupational noise management – hearing protector program.

For more information refer to SA Health Policy Guideline - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – Selection.
4.6 Audiometric Testing

SA Health LHN / HS / BU / WPs must provide audiometric testing for a worker who is carrying out work for the business or undertaking if the worker is required to frequently use personal hearing protectors as a control measure for noise that exceeds the exposure standard. Where PHP is provided as a control measure audiometric testing for the worker must be provided within 3 months of commencing work or in any event at least every 2 years. *(Note: More frequent audiometric testing every 6 months may be needed if exposures are at a high LAeq,8h, which is equal or greater than 100 dB(A)).*

Audiometric testing and assessment of audiograms should be carried out by competent persons in accordance with the procedures in AS/NZS 1269.4:2005 - Occupational noise management - Auditory assessment.

Routine audiometric testing of the hearing of SA Health workers will not be carried out; however, any worker concerned that noise exposure in the workplace may be impacting on their hearing can request an audiometric testing by a qualified audiologist. In these instances managers should consult with their LHN/HS WHS business unit for further assistance.

4.7 Ototoxic Substances

Exposure to a number of common industrial chemicals and some medications can cause hearing loss or exacerbate the effects of noise on hearing. These chemicals are known as ototoxic substances (see SA Health WHSIM Form - Common Ototoxic Chemicals including some medications (FOR028)). Ototoxic substances absorbed into the bloodstream may damage the cochlea in the inner ear and/or the auditory pathways to the brain, leading to hearing loss and tinnitus. Hearing loss is more likely if exposure is to a combination of substances or a combination of the substance and noise.

It is recommended that the daily noise exposure of workers exposed to any of the substances listed in Appendix 1 be reduced to 80 dB (A) or below. They should also undergo audiometric testing and be given information on ototoxic substances.

4.8 Acoustic Shock

Acoustic incidents are sudden, unexpected loud noises occurring during telephone headset use, including crackles, hisses, whistles, shrieks or high-pitched noises. Acoustic shock is not caused by the loudness of a telephone, as all phone noise is electronically limited to a peak noise level of 123 decibels, but by a sudden rise in noise levels. The effect on individuals can vary greatly for the same increase in sound level. Only a small number of individuals develop symptoms from an acoustic incident.

Control measures to eliminate or minimise the risk of acoustic shock include:

- providing high quality headsets with acoustic shock protection devices;
- giving prompt attention to damaged equipment and network faults – the equipment or network supplier or an acoustic specialist should be contacted if necessary;
- ensuring the proper fitting, use and maintenance of headsets;
- reducing background noise in the room;
• providing information and training on how to detect warning sounds for example, cordless phones being used too close to the base station at the customer end. Training on warning sounds should also prepare operators to know when to remove headsets as quickly as possible, where necessary;
• with hot-desking work, ensuring workers turn the headset volume down as soon as possible after a changeover;
• considering work organisation issues, such as unreasonable or unrealistic performance pressures or demands, which may cause tension and distress;
• preventing mobile phones from being used in call centres.

4.9 Signage

Areas where people may be exposed to excessive noise must be sign-posted as Hearing Protection Areas and their boundaries should be clearly defined. No worker, including visitors, must enter a hearing protection area during normal operation, unless wearing appropriate PHP.

4.10 Procurement

Purchasers of new plant and equipment must ensure that plant or equipment in operation doesn’t exceed noise emission prior to its use.

Designers, manufacturers, suppliers and importers of plant must give purchasers and other potential users the information they need to safely use the plant, including the results of any calculations, analysis or testing carried out. Information must include the noise emission values of the plant, the operating conditions of the plant when the noise emission is measured and the methods used to measure the noise emission. This information will help purchasers choose plant with low noise levels.

4.11 Incident Management

In accordance with SA Health Policy Directive – Work Health Safety Reporting and Investigation efficient and timely hazard and incident reporting, investigation and resolution is an integral component of a successful and compliant safe work system.

All WHS hazard, incidents with injury and/or no harm must be reported on the SA Health Safety Learning System (SLS). Refer to SA Health Procedure – Reporting and Investigating WHS Hazards and Incidents and SA Health Flowchart – Work Health Safety Incident Reporting and Investigation for the step by step process.

All incidents that affect a client (or other persons) must be reported as a patient incident in the SA Health Safety Learning System (SLS) to ensure the correct investigation is conducted.

Where an injury has been sustained by a worker, the injury must also be reported to WHS Injury Management on 1800 702 264. All SAAS workers must report the injury to the SAAS State Duty Manager on 1800 886 268.

4.12 Records Management
SA Health is accountable to maintain and protect the integrity and accessibility of all official documents and records by ensuring SA Health LHN/HS/BU and workplaces have a robust document control and records management system.

All official WHS records must be retained either centrally or locally in accordance with Work Health Safety Regulations 2012 (SA) and disposed of in accordance with GDS30 – General Disposal Schedule (State Records) and SA Health Policy Guideline – System Documentation Management (WHSIM).

Hearing and noise management generated records must be maintained and kept as follows:
- All workplace noise assessment(s) – 5 years
- All worker audiometric testing – 30 years

Health monitoring records must be kept for at least 30 years from the date of the last entry, be kept separate from any Human Resource records and Hospital Medical Records, and kept confidential.

4.13 Information, Training, Instruction and Supervision

Training should be provided to:
- Workers who may be exposed to hazardous noise or other agents that may contribute to hearing loss;
- Managers and supervisors;
- Workplace health and safety committees and health and safety representatives;
- Persons responsible for the purchase of plant, noise control equipment, personal hearing protectors and for the design, scheduling, organisation and layout of work.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

In accordance with SA Health Policy Directive – Roles, Responsibilities and Governance (WHS), the following outlines the respective roles of relevant parties in the context of this Policy Guideline:

5.1 Chief Executive / Deputy Chief Executives
Will take reasonably practicable steps to:
- Exercise due diligence to ensure compliance with the intent of this policy guideline;
- Establish awareness of and accountability for the implementation of this policy guideline.

5.2 Chief Executive Officers / Chief Operating Officers (LHN / HS / BU)
Will take reasonably practicable steps to:
- Exercise due diligence to ensure compliance with the intent of this policy guideline;
- Establish awareness of and accountability for the implementation of this policy guideline;
• Provide financial and physical resources needed for the implementation and support of this policy guideline;
• Demonstrate an understanding of, and commitment to, a systematic hazard and risk management process to eliminate or minimise risk that arise from noise at the workplace.

5.3 Executive Directors / General Managers / Directors (LHN / HS / BU)
Will take reasonably practicable steps to:
• Exercise due diligence to ensure compliance with the intent of this policy guideline;
• Demonstrate an understanding of and a commitment to the systematic hazard identification and risk management process to eliminate or minimise risk that arise from noise at the workplace;
• Ensure the allocation and use of worker and financial resources to effectively manage and support the hazard identification and risk management program;
• Ensure that managers and supervisors have the knowledge and the skills to determine the training needs of workers;
• Monitor the effectiveness of existing noise risk control measures, strategies and treatments.

5.4 Site Managers / Line Managers / Supervisors / Team Leaders
Will take reasonably practicable steps to:
• Exercise due diligence (where relevant) to ensure compliance with the intent of this policy guideline;
• Provide workers with adequate direction and support to fulfil their responsibilities regarding workplace noise;
• Ensure that so far as reasonably practicable, that workers and others are not exposed to health and safety risks arising from the business or undertaking;
• Consult workers and health and safety representatives for noise hazards identified;
• Ensure hearing protected areas are sign posted;
• Provide PHP to workers who are exposed to hazardous noise;
• Maintain all PHP in accordance with AS/NZS 1269.3 Occupational noise management – hearing protector program;
• Ensure workers that are exposed to noise level above the standard receive audiometric testing.

5.5 Workers
Will take reasonable care to:
• Not adversely affect the health and safety of themselves and other persons;
• Follow any reasonable instruction and with all relevant SA Health policies, LHN/HS/BU procedures and information relating to health and safety at the workplace e.g. when personal hearing protectors is provided;
• Immediately report to the line supervisor or HSR or both any noise hazards, equipment malfunctions, and other events involving workplace noise;
• Report all other hazards, unsafe work practices or hazardous working conditions to their line supervisor before the end of shift / working day;
• Assist line supervisor with the risk assessment and hazard control process for workplace noise, as directed;
• Use and maintain PHP as required for their intended purpose.

5.6 Workforce Health Professionals
Must take reasonable care to:
• Provide specialist advice, guidance and recommendations with respect to legislative requirements including interpretation of the *WHS Regulations 2012* (SA) and relevant Codes of Practice;
• Facilitate the implementation of this policy guideline throughout their respective LHN / HS / BU / WP;
• Monitor compliance with this policy guideline and report on implementation outcomes;
• Provide advice, information and support to managers and workers with regards to hazard identification, risk management, and any incident involving noise throughout their delegated LHN/HS/BU/ WP;
• Ensure an investigation is conducted and the appropriate corrective actions have been taken for all noise incidents
• Ensure SafeWork SA has been notified for all notifiable incidents
• Consult with LHN/HS/BU/ WP Health and Safety Representatives with respect to noise risk management.

6. Reporting

6.1 Incidents reporting and the Safety Learning System

In accordance with *SA Health Policy Directive – Work Health Safety Reporting and Investigation* efficient and timely hazard and incident reporting, investigation and resolution is an integral component of a successful and compliant safe work system.

All WHS hazard, incidents with injury and/or no harm must be reported on the SA Health Safety Learning System (SLS).

Refer to *SA Health Procedure - Reporting & Investigating WHS Hazards and Incidents* and *SA Health Flowchart – Work Health Safety Incident Reporting and Investigation* for the step by step process.

All incidents that affect a client/patient (or other persons) must be reported as a patient incident in the SA Health Safety Learning System (SLS) to ensure the correct investigation is conducted.

Where an injury has been sustained by a worker, the injury must also be reported to WHS Injury Management on 1800 702 264. All SAAS workers must report the injury to the SAAS State Duty Manager on 1800 886 268.

6.2 Reporting Incidents to the Regulator

All dangerous incidents, work related deaths and injuries that require admittance to hospital as an inpatient or immediate treatment for any condition constitute a Notifiable Incident and must be immediately reported to the regulator SafeWork SA in accordance with Section 38 of the *Work Health and Safety Act 2012* (SA).

Workforce WHS Managers are delegated with the authority, through Workforce Directors, to record the LHN/HS/BU/ WP notifiable incident on the relevant SA Health WHSIM Notifiable Incident Register.

For further guidance on how to report a notifiable incident, refer to flowchart *SA Health Form – Reporting and Notification of a Notifiable Incident.*
7. EPAS

N/A

8. National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards

This Policy Guideline also aligns with the EQuIP standard 5 Number 15: Corporate Systems and Safety.

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9. Other

N/A

10. Risk Management

Work Health and Safety risk management guidance and considerations defined in this policy guideline align in principle with the SA Health Risk Management Framework 2014 and ISO 31000 Risk Management - Principles and guidelines.

11. Evaluation

In accordance with SA Health Policy Directive – Performance Review and Continuous Improvement, implementation of this policy guideline will be monitored via the SA Health WHS Internal Audit Program against the following criteria:

- A hazard identification and risk management process is established, monitored and reviewed in consultation with workers who have the potential to be exposed to noise in the workplace.
- Risks associated with identified noise hazards are assessed.
- Control strategies for identified noise hazards are aligned with the ‘hierarchy of control’.
- Workers are not exposed to noise levels that exceed exposure standards.
- Workers who are required to wear PPE to reduce noise exposure are offered audiometric testing in accordance with relevant standards.
• Areas where PPE is required to reduce exposure to noise is sign-posted
• Safe work procedures are available and current which document measures to control risks associated with noise related hazards where relevant.
• Noise emission from new equipment is assessed prior to purchase.
• Induction and training programs include information regarding control measures for noise related hazards where relevant.
• Workers are consulted in relation to the management of noise related hazards.
• Documentation relating to management of noise related hazards is retained for requisite time periods.

12. Definitions

Reference may be made to the SA Health Work Health Safety Injury Management System – Glossary and Terms for clarification of any general terms used throughout this policy guideline.

In the context of this document:

• **Audiometric testing** means: the measurement of the hearing threshold levels of a person by means of monaural pure tone air conduction threshold tests.

• **Competent Person** means: a competent person who has accurately calibrated noise measuring instruments and, through training and experience:
  • understands the requirements of the WHS Regulations for noise
  • knows how to check the performance of the instruments
  • knows how to take the measurements properly
  • can interpret the results of the noise measurements.

• **Decibel (dB)** means: the unit for measuring the sound levels.

• **Exposure standard for noise** is defined in the WHS Regulations as an LAeq,8h of 85 dB(A) or an LC,peak of 140 dB(C). There are two parts to the exposure standard for noise because noise can either cause gradual hearing loss over a period of time or be so loud that it causes immediate hearing loss.

• **LAeq,8h** means: the eight hour equivalent continuous A-weighted sound pressure level in decibels, referenced to 20 micropascals, determined in accordance with AS/NZS 1269.1:2005 Occupational noise management—Measurement and assessment of noise immission and exposure. This is related to the total amount of noise energy a person is exposed to in the course of their working day. It takes account of both the noise level and the length of time the person is exposed to it. An unacceptable risk of hearing loss occurs at LAeq,8h values above 85 dB(A).

• **LC,peak** means: the C-weighted peak sound pressure level in decibels (dB(C)), referenced to 20 micropascals, determined in accordance with AS/NZS 1269.1:2005 Occupational noise management—Measurement and assessment of noise immission and exposure. It usually relates to loud, sudden noises such as a gunshot or hammering. LC,peak values above 140 dB(C) can cause immediate damage to hearing.

• **Hazardous noise in relation to hearing loss** means: noise that exceeds the exposure standard for noise in the workplace.
• **Risk control** means: taking action to first eliminate health and safety risks so far as is reasonably practicable, and if that is not possible, minimising the risks so far as is reasonably practicable. Eliminating a hazard will also eliminate any risks associated with that hazard.

### 13. Associated Policy Directives / Policy Guidelines

- SA Health Policy Directive – Hazard Identification and Risk Management (WHS)
- SA Health Policy Directive - High Risk Work Safety (WHS)
- SA Health Policy Directive – Performance Review and Continuous Improvement
- SA Health Policy Guideline - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – Selection
- SA Health Policy Directive – Roles, Responsibilities and Governance (WHS)
- SA Health Policy Directive – Work Health, Safety and Injury Management (WHSIM)
- SA Health Policy Directive – Work Health Safety Reporting and Investigation
- SA Health Policy Guideline - System Documentation Management (WHSIM)
- SA Health Procedure – Reporting and Investigating WHS Hazards and Incidents
- SA Health Risk Management Framework 2014
- SA Health Work Health Safety Injury Management System – Glossary and Terms

### 14. References, Resources and Related Documents

- *Work Health and Safety Act 2012* (SA)
- *Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012* (SA)
- SafeWork Australia Code of Practice - Managing Noise and Preventing Hearing Loss at Work, December 2011
- SA Health WHSIM Flowchart – Work Health Safety Incident Reporting and Investigation (FOR222)
- SA Health WHSIM Form - Common Ototoxic Chemicals including some medications (FOR028)
- SA Health WHSIM Form – Noise Hazard Identification Checklist (FOR033)
- SA Health WHSIM Form – Reporting and Notification of a Notifiable Incident (FOR223)
- Standards Australia AS/NZS 1269.3:2005 Occupational noise management - hearing protector program