

NOISE INDUCED HEARING LOSS

MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT

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Over half a million people in the UK are employed in bars, clubs and other entertainment venues. Entertainment-related noise is recognised as potentially the greatest cause of under-diagnosed deafness. In most industries, noise is an unwanted by-product of the process. For the music and entertainment sectors, it may be the sole point of the exercise. The real challenge for the sector is to protect workers while still delivering the experience the customer expects. Some of the difficulties the sector faces in complying with the new legislation are as follows:-

- There are strongly held views on the subject of music for pleasure. Many workers, sector organisations and audiences are still incensed by the suggestion that noise should be reduced.
- Adequate and consistent control options available to employers in the sector are often complicated by the physical characteristics of existing venues, the diversity of events and even the temperamental nature of 'artistes' who may refuse to work within the control parameters established. In addition, when considering the usual hierarchy of controls familiar to health and safety professionals, total elimination is clearly not possible or desired.
- Most musicians operate on a freelance basis. Whilst they are working, they are effectively employees and entitled to protection under health and safety law. This becomes more complicated as the individual may arrange an event themselves, sometimes effectively becoming the employer, with the insurance and health and safety responsibilities that attach.
- It's difficult to establish the average typical weekly exposure whether that is for a freelance musician, DJ or bar worker. The largest exposure may emanate from the musician's own instrument, which may occur outside the 'employer's time'. Employers must have dialogue on the extent of the weekly allowance which belongs to them, and how much to the individual for their other commitments.

POTENTIAL DANGER

There is a danger that solicitors and claims farmers have yet to wake up to the potential fee income from civil claims in this sector. Very few employers are likely to have been compliant with the existing, never mind new, regulations. Historically, local authority enforcement has concentrated on the 'amplified' sector, nuisance to neighbours and keeping audience exposure below the agreed 'event' Leq restriction of 103dB. Whilst Local Authorities are not as cohesive as the HSE, there has been a marked rise in enforcement of noise legislation in night clubs and entertainment venues across the country.

The sector needs to take the lesson from other industries that control measures can be difficult and expensive to implement after the event. The HSE intends to release specific guidance before the transitional period expires but in the meantime every opportunity should be utilised to take the issue into account as new venues come on-line. For existing venues holistic control strategies need to be considered. This may include the use of sound monitoring equipment and sound mapping for venues, repositioning of sound amplification equipment, audiometric testing for employees and a system whereby staff can be rotated during their working day to have periods away from the loudest area of the venue.