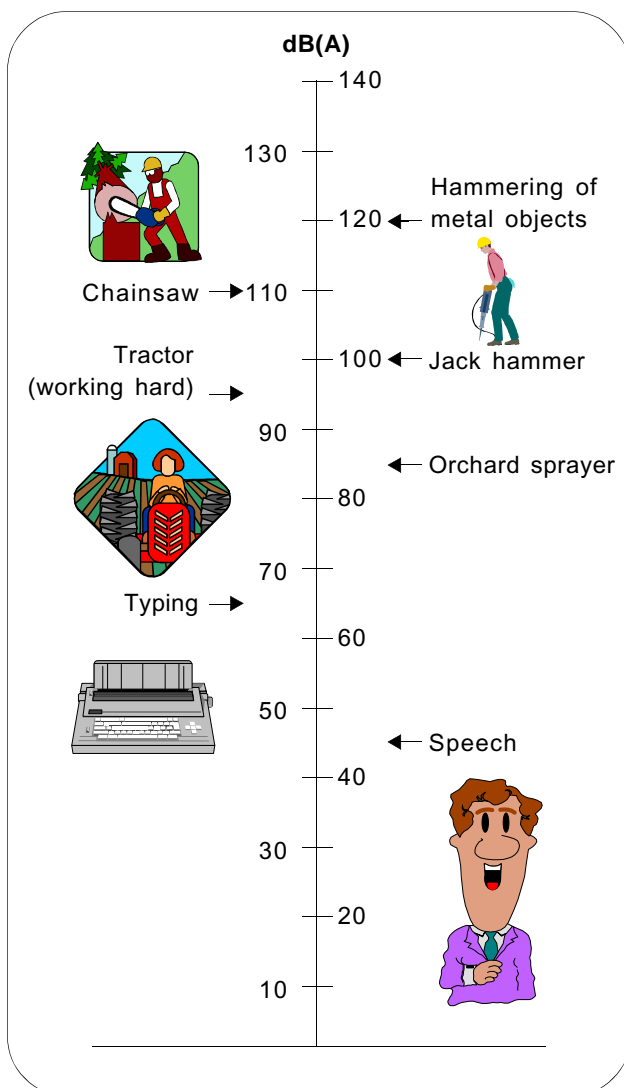


Noise Levels

So how much noise is too noisy, and how loud is too loud? The noise levels you may be exposed to in your workplace may vary from 45 dB(A) when someone is talking up to 140 dB(A) which may cause pain. Below is a pictorial representation of the level of noise produced by some work equipment and machinery.



Under the Health and Safety in Employment (HSE) Regulations 1995, wherever noise exceeds the exposure standard of 85 dB(A) over an eight-hour period and a peak noise level of 140 (linear), then your employer must take steps to reduce the noise.

There are some simple ways to judge if noise is likely to be harmful:

- When the noise is as loud or louder than heavy city traffic.
- If you have to raise your voice to speak to someone a metre away.
- When you hear ringing in your ears after the noise exposure.
- When things sound different after the noise exposure.

The best way to reduce workers' noise exposure is to:

- **Eliminate the source of the noise.**
Big noise reductions can be made, for example, by simply lining metal chutes and bins with scrap rubber conveyor belting, or using vibration insulation mounting such as rubber or plastic cushions.
- **Isolate the noise from reaching people.**
This can be done by moving a noisy machine away from people, by building a soundproof enclosure around it, or by putting a barrier up between the machine and people, e.g. sound absorbent screens or curtains.
- **Minimise the time people are exposed.**
Where possible, people should swap between noisy and quiet jobs, and noisy work should be

scheduled for times when few workers as possible are present.

- Wearing personal hearing protection when necessary. If noise exposure is still excessive after all possible control measures have been taken, individual protection like earmuffs and earplugs should be worn.

What else can you do as employees to reduce noise exposure?

- Take a co-operative interest in workplace noise problems.
- Help develop policies, plans and practices for dealing with workplace noise problems.
- Suggest possible noise control measures for machines that you operate.
- Assist plant engineers or consultants to develop design solutions.

- Use noise control equipment supplied.
- Take responsibility for the preservation of your own hearing by using hearing protectors whenever necessary.

Excessive exposure to noise causes hearing loss. Hearing loss leads to a reduction in the quality of life and can, and should be, prevented. In the workplace this can be achieved through a noise reduction programme. If you think there is a noise problem where you work, or if you have hearing problems that you think could be work-related, talk to your employer or workplace health and safety representative.

DO IT NOW!