

FIRE SERVICES EXAMINATIONS BOARD
STUDY NOTE

EXAMINATION	SUB-OFFICERS EXAMINATION
PAPER	HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
SUBJECT	HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE
ITEM	NOISE AT WORK REGULATIONS
STUDY NOTE No.	2310

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY NOTE

This study note has been prepared as the basis of study in connection with the qualifying examinations for promotion.

Candidates will be expected to demonstrate knowledge of the information contained in the study note and understand how it be applied:

The 'References' made at the end of the Study Note are included for information only and candidates will not be expected to study these as part of the bibliography.

THE NOISE AT WORK REGULATIONS 1989

1. Introduction

Personnel can be exposed to excessive noise at work, which can be damaging to health and could lead to permanent hearing loss. Excessive noise at work could for example be encountered:

- (a) during driver training;
- (b) using operational equipment; and
- (c) whilst operating pumps and high rise appliances.

Sub-Officers need to be aware of The Noise at Work Regulations 1989 that have been introduced and which impose a general duty on employers to reduce the risk of hearing damage to employees from noise generated in the workplace. This study note outlines some of the requirements of those regulations.

2. Duties

The regulations place duties on employers:

- (a) to reduce the risk of damage to the hearing of the employees; and
- (b) where an employee is likely to be exposed to noise, a competent person must carry out a noise assessment and keep records of them until new ones are carried out.

3. Noise Assessment

Noise is measured in decibels (dB) and the regulations set out three "action levels" for which specific steps must be taken when noise reaches these levels.

(a) First Action Level

At or above a daily personal noise exposure of 85 dB (A) employers must:

- (i) identify all employees affected;
- (ii) inform employees of the potential risk to hearing;
- (iii) provide hearing protection on request; and
- (iv) provide adequate training.

(b) Second Action Level

At or above a daily personal noise exposure of 90 dB (A) employers must, in addition to the measures above:

- (i) identify noise zones where the level is reached;
- (ii) provide and ensure personal hearing protection is used within these zones; and
- (iii) reduce the exposure of employees as far as reasonably practicable other than by personal hearing protection.

(c) Peak Action Level

This level is where employees are subjected to small numbers of loud impulse noises during an otherwise quiet day. The required measures for this action level are not covered by this study note.

4. Noise Control

The regulations require that noise should be controlled by means other than the use of hearing protection, which should be used as a last resort. Control measures may include:

- (a) removing those affected from the area
- (b) reducing the length of exposure
- (c) examining how the noise levels can be reduced (engineering controls)
- (d) containing the noise; and
- (e) providing appropriate hearing protection.

The Sub-Officer has a duty to ensure that the selected control measures are enforced.

5. Hearing Protection

Hearing protection comes in two sorts - earplugs inserted into the outer ear and earmuffs which fit over the ear. Protection is selected on its suitability to reduce the noise and, most importantly, for its comfort. This means that a selection must be provided. If protectors are not worn for even short periods, the protection is greatly reduced. Where hearing protection is mandatory due to the levels of noise, it must be worn constantly.

6. Health Issues

- (a) Noise can cause a loss of hearing. This is a permanent condition and is untreatable.
- (b) Above 90 dB (A) the risk of serious damage rises rapidly, and also over longer periods of exposure.
- (c) High noise levels can interfere with communications. This can cause stress.
- (d) High noise levels can cause tinnitus including a single loud event. This is a hum, whistle or whine in the ears and there is no effective treatment.
- (e) Audiometry is the technique for assessing a person's hearing ability. It can provide an effective check on changes in hearing if carried out regularly.

References

The Noise at Work Regulations 1989