

Ref: FOI/CAD/ID 3385

**Please reply to:**  
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24 June 2016

### Freedom of Information Act 2000

I am writing in response to your request for information made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in relation to complaints about noise for 2013 – 2016.

*How many noise-related complaints the organisation has received in the past three years? For each year, I would like to know:*

*The department/ward the noise-related complaint refers to*

*Who made the complaint (patient/relative/staff member etc.)*

*The nature of the complaint – i.e. if it is noise from staff, noise from another patient, equipment, building work etc.*

*I would also to know if your organisation has a noise policy or any noise-reduction measures in place – for example soft-closing doors, not transferring patients at night, 'sleep kits' for patients and so on.*

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust has no specific subject code for complaints about 'noise' but we have searched the database for any complaints where the word 'noise' was included in the description. The following data is based on that search.

Number of formal complaints about noise received	Year (financial)
0	2015-16
0	2014-15
0	2013-14

Please see the following policy regarding workplace excessive noise:

## Workplace Excessive Noise Policy and Procedure

<b>Requested/ Required by:</b>	Trust Health and Safety Committee <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.</li><li>• The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005.</li><li>• Workplace Health and safety standards – July 2013</li></ul>
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<b>Document lead:</b>	Risk and Compliance Manager <b>Contact details:</b> ext 24581
<b>Directorate:</b>	Quality and Governance
<b>Specialty:</b>	Quality and Safety
<b>Supersedes:</b>	New Policy and Procedure
<b>Approved by:</b>	Health and Safety Committee, 4 <sup>th</sup> November 2013
<b>Ratified by:</b>	Quality and Safety Committee, 13 <sup>th</sup> November 2013
<b>Review date:</b>	November 2015

## Document history

<b>Requirement for document:</b>	<p>The 'Control of Noise at Work regulations 2005' requires that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Trust eliminates or reduces risks to health and safety from noise at work.</li> </ul> <p>This is achieved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying areas where noise could be a risk.</li> <li>• Measuring noise levels in those areas</li> <li>• Taking action to reduce noise exposure (if required)</li> <li>• Provide employees with hearing protection (if required)</li> <li>• Ensure legal limits on noise exposure is not exceeded</li> <li>• Carryout health surveillance (if required)</li> </ul>
<b>Cross references:</b>	<p>The Trust's strategies, policies and guidance are held on the Trust Intranet (Policies and Guidelines) and can be accessed by all staff.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust. <i>Health and Safety Policy and Procedure</i> [RWF-OPPPCS-NC-CG1]</li> <li>2. Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust. <i>Risk Assessment Policy and Procedure</i> [RWF-OPPPCS-NC-CG6]</li> <li>3. Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust. <i>Risk Management Policy and Strategy</i> [RWF-OPPPCS-NC-CG13]</li> <li>4. Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust. <i>Management of Stress at Work Policy and Procedure</i> [RWF-OPPPCS-NC-WF3]</li> <li>5. INDG362 (Rev2) - Noise at Work (a brief guide to controlling the risks)</li> </ol>
<b>Associated documents:</b>	Control of Noise at Work regulations 2005

<b>Version Control:</b>		
<b>Issue:</b>	<b>Description of changes:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
1.0	New Policy and Procedure	November 2013

## Policy Statement for

# Workplace Excessive Noise Policy

Exposure to excessive noise can cause hearing damage and even loss; the effects may be cumulative and irreversible. Noise also interferes with communication and may therefore compromise safety. This policy aim is to effectively manage noise so as to ensure safety.

The Trust will meet its legal requirements under the 'Control of Noise at Work regulations 2005' in that it will eliminate or minimise the risks to health and safety from noise at work.

Where excessive noise is identified noise risk assessments will be carried out and controls introduced to reduce the risk to acceptable levels.

# Workplace Excessive Noise Procedure

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## 1.0 Introduction and scope

The 'Control of Noise at Work regulations 2005' requires that the Trust eliminates or reduces risks to health and safety from noise at work.

The legislation refers to noise that can cause harm to hearing and hence noise that is above certain levels of sound. It does not cover nuisance noise which is low level but annoying. This category of noise would be assessed as part of a workplace stress risk assessment (reference 4).

Managing risks from excessive noise is achieved by:

- Identifying areas where noise could be a risk.
- Measuring noise levels in those areas
- Taking action to reduce noise exposure (if required)
- Providing employees with hearing protection (if required)
- Ensuring legal limits on noise exposure is not exceeded
- Carrying out health surveillance (if required)

This procedure explains this process.

## 2.0 Definitions

### 2.1 Noise

Noise is defined as unwanted sound.

### 2.2 Intensity of sound

Intensity is how loud noise is. It is measured in decibels (dB).

### 2.3 Frequency of sound

Frequency is how high or low the sound is, measured in Hertz (Hz) or Kilohertz (KHz).

### 2.4 Sound Pressure Level (SPL)

Hearing is affected by a combination of intensity and frequency. Sound as it is detected by the ear is measured in A-weighted decibels dB(A):

80 dB @ 31.5 Hz	(large compressor)	= 41 dB(A)
80 dB @ 500 Hz	(rumbling machinery)	= 77 dB(A)
80 dB @ 2 KHz	(escaping compressed air)	= 81 dB(A)

The risk of harm depends on the sound level. All measurements should be in dB(A)

Scale:	-	140	dB(A)	Peak.
	-	135	dB(A)	Threshold of pain.
	-	100	dB(A)	Nightclub music.
	-	90-95	dB(A)	Grinders.
	-	80-85	dB(A)	Tube train.
	-	60	dB(A)	Normal conversation.
	-	30	dB(A)	Library.

Below 80 dB(A) there is little risk of hearing damage.

80 dB(A) to 85 dB(A) some individuals may suffer hearing damage

Above 85 dB(A) there is a high risk of hearing damage and continued

exposure will result in hearing loss and deafness.

- 0 dB(A) Threshold of hearing.

## 2.5 Daily Personal Noise Exposure ( $L_{EP,d}$ )

Average amount of noise an employee will experience over an 8 hour day.

## 2.6 Peak Sound Pressure Levels ( $L_{C-peak}$ )

Highest noise level the employee could be exposed to.

## 2.7 Exposure action levels

The Noise Regulations define 'exposure action values' – levels of noise exposure which, if exceeded, require you to take specific action. There are 'lower' and 'upper' action values.

	Lower exposure action value (dB(A))	Upper exposure action value (dB(A))	Peak exposure action value (dB(A))
Daily Personal Noise Exposure levels ( $L_{EP,d}$ )	80	85	87
Peak Sound Pressure Levels ( $L_{C-peak}$ )	135	137	

## 3.0 Duties / roles and accountabilities of key staff

### 3.1 Managers

All Managers are responsible for the Health Safety and Welfare of their patients, visitors and staff. Where the workplace noise could be hazardous, a risk assessment should be conducted and appropriate control measures put in place to minimise the effects. Any risk assessment must be reviewed regularly and amended as necessary to reflect any changes in the work environment.

Managers are also responsible for:

- ensuring staff have received and understood training on the effects of exposure to noise and the training is recorded;
- ensuring staff wear protective equipment in hearing zones;
- ensuring staff attend for health surveillance;
- ensuring they maintain records of health surveillance

### 3.2 Trust Health and Safety Advisor

Will undertake sound assessments on request from managers and will advise on control measures required.

### 3.3 All staff

All employees have a duty to ensure that they have read and understood any existing risk assessments and follow any safe systems introduced to protect their hearing. This may include the wearing of personal protective equipment.

All staff are also responsible for:

- attending for health surveillance (as required),
- attending training,

- looking after any hearing protection issued to them
- ensuring they wear appropriate hearing protection in designated zones.

#### **4.0 Training / competency requirements**

There is no formal training for assessing workplace noise, however, the Trust Health and Safety Advisor is competent to undertake these assessments.

Employees need to be trained to follow safe systems and in the wearing and care of any necessary personal protective equipment. This will be carried out by Managers in the workplace.

#### **5.0 Procedures**

##### **5.1 Causes and effects of hearing damage**

- (1) Acoustic trauma from impact noise (loud bangs) – Acute (can be reversible).
- (2) Threshold shifts
  - (a) Temporary loss of hearing range – acute.
  - (b) Permanent loss of hearing range – chronic.
- (3) Tinnitus - Ringing in the ears – acute or chronic
- (4) Some infectious childhood diseases and other medical conditions - chronic
- (5) Noise induced hearing loss (NIHL) - chronic - permanent hearing loss following repeated exposure to high sound levels.

Excessive noise at work can result in loss of hearing range and eventually deafness.

##### **5.2 Factors affecting loss of hearing and action levels**

- (1) Heredity
- (2) Side effects of prescription drugs
- (3) Increasing age (Presbycusis)
- (4) Exposure to noise (noise induced hearing loss - NIHL)

Loss of hearing can be a result of age and genetics. It could also be a result of lifestyle and excessive noise out side of work. However, excessive noise must be avoided in work. The legislation places requirements on employers dependent on the sound level in the workplace and how this relates to the action levels.

Lower action level to upper action level (80 to 85 dB(A)):

- Must have a noise assessment carried out by a competent person.
- Must provide information and training to staff.
- Hearing protection to be provided to employees on request.

Above the higher action level (>85 dB(A)) :

- Must have a noise assessment carried out by a competent person.
- Must provide information and training to staff.
- Hearing protection zones to be identified.
- Must provide relevant signage.
- Control to be achieved by means other than personal protective equipment (PPE) so far as is reasonably practical (SFRP).  
(must consider engineering options first)

- use of personal protective equipment (PPE) must be mandatory.

Above the peak exposure action level (>87 dB(A)) :

- Employees must not be exposed to any noise above 87 dB(A). Can take in to account any reduction in exposure provided by hearing protection

Regulation 10 of the legislation places a duty on employers to ensure control measures are used and a duty on employees to use control measures.

### **5.3 Noise surveys**

Any noise risk assessment must include a noise survey carried out by a competent person. The Trust's health and safety advisor has a meter and will undertake surveys on request.

A noise survey consists of measurements of sound levels at relevant points within the workplace. These are recorded on a plan or map of the workplace. Before measurement the following should be considered:

- Layout of area
- Results of previous assessments
- Discuss staff concerns with staff and union safety representatives.
- Identify noisy machines and machines where the noise could vary.
- Identify areas with the greatest presence of employees and where employees spend significant periods of time.
- Consider machinery manufactures noise data and specifications.
- Review current control measures:
  - Sound enclosures
  - Reduced time exposures
  - Hearing protection worn.
- Consider who will be exposed:
  - Employees exposure times
  - Peripatetic workers (maintenance, cleaners, security etc.)
  - Visitors and contractors
- Identify sources of noise and background noise
- The tasks undertaken in the area that could produce noise.
- Ensure the meter is fit for purpose and properly calibrated

The noise survey will consist of:

- Obtaining or drawing plans of the work area
- Marking sources of sound on the plan
- Measure SPL values at planned locations  
SPL = Sound Pressure Levels (the total noise).
- Ensure all machinery is operating at their highest noise levels
- Measure background noise (machinery at low noise levels).
- Add sound levels to the plan

### **5.4 Analysis of the survey and controls**

#### **5.4.1 Engineering controls**

On completion of the survey Compare  $L_{EP,d}$  levels with action levels under the “Noise at Work Regulations 1989. This will determine what controls are required. Engineering controls should be considered first. These will include:

- INSULATION (enclosure) – Install a sound adsorbing material.
- DAMPING (vibration isolation) – fitting damping pads or stiffening ribs.
- SILENCING – gasses can be very noisy so add silencer.
- ISOLATION (noise haven) –enclose operators in acoustically quiet booth.
- ABSORBTION (hanging absorbers) – use wall appliances or ceiling panels to adsorb sound.

#### 5.4.2 Personal protective equipment

Once all reasonably practical engineering controls have been considered then personal protective equipment needs to be considered. There are many forms of hearing protection from disposable ear plugs to solid ear defenders.

Selection of design used should consider:

- All hearing protection equipment (HPE) has manufacturer’s attenuation data. These are quoted at various frequencies and give the amount of protection offered by the equipment. These can be subtracted from the measured sound levels to give the employees actual exposure.
- All equipment purchased must meet recognised standards.
- The work being undertaken (heat, cleanliness etc.).
- The abilities and understanding of the employees (simplicity).
- The opinion of the employees (comfort).
- Availability and disposal of any single use equipment.
- Storage, care and cleanliness of repetitive use equipment.

#### 5.4.3 Safe systems and hearing zones

The survey will result in a safe system of work. This must be followed by all staff and apply to all visitors to the area. The safe system will include:

- What controls and hearing protection is required
- Maintenance, care and storage of hearing protection
- Description and location of all hearing zones (on a plan).  
Hearing zones are areas where hearing protection must be worn by all staff.

All staff must read and understand the noise risk assessment and safe system. Any hearing zones must be marked and appropriate signage displayed.

#### 5.4.4 Health surveillance

All employees who work in hearing zones will be subject to health surveillance. This will be determined and delivered by occupational health department and will depend on the hazards identified.

The health surveillance program begins prior to exposure, then annually for two years then 3 yearly if all is satisfactory.



## **6.0 Monitoring and audit**

The effects of excessive workplace noise will be monitored by Occupational Health Department and the safety team. Any issues will be discussed at Health and Safety Committee.

## **APPENDIX ONE**

### **Process requirements**

#### **1.0 Implementation and awareness**

- This policy and procedure will be approved by the Trust Health and Safety Committee following consultation and discussion.
- Once approved the document lead or author will submit this policy/procedural document to the Clinical Governance Assistant who will activate it on the Trust approved document management database on the intranet, under 'Trust polices, procedures and leaflets'.
- A monthly publications table is produced by the Clinical Governance Assistant which is published on the Bulletin Board (Trust intranet) under "Trust Publications"; notification of the posting is included on a bi-weekly Bulletin Board round-up email, circulated Trust wide by the Communications team.
- On receipt of the Trust wide Bulletin Board notification all managers should ensure that their staff members are aware of the new publications.
- This policy and procedure will be shared with all Managers, Risk Assessors, and Union Safety Representatives.
- It will be included in Risk and Health and safety training throughout the Trust. It will be used in response to incident reports written by staff identifying issues around workplace temperatures.

#### **2.0 Review**

The policy and procedure will be reviewed and revised by the authors on a regular basis (once every two years, or sooner should changes in legislation or practice require it). There will be a regular review of incident reports that focus on issues of workplace temperature. The Risk Manager will review the policy/strategy and, even when alterations have not been made, undertake the consultation process as detailed in **Appendix 2 (Consultation)**.

#### **3.0 Archiving**

The Trust intranet retains all superseded files in an archive directory in order to maintain document history.

## APPENDIX TWO

### CONSULTATION ON: Workplace Noise Policy and Procedure

**Consultation process** – Use this form to ensure your consultation has been adequate for the purpose.

**Please return comments to:** Risk & Compliance Manager

**By date:** 8<sup>th</sup> October 2013

Name:	Date sent	Date reply received	Modification suggested? Y/N	Modification made? Y/N
<b>Essential Staff who must reply</b>				
Trust Health and Safety Advisor	17.09.13			
Estates Health and Safety Advisor	17.09.13	17-9-13	Y	Y
<b>Others who may wish to comment</b>				
Members of the Health and Safety Committee	17.09.13			
Local Security Management Specialist	17.09.13	17.09.13	N	
Compliance Engineer (Estates)	17.09.13	17.09.13	Y	Y
Senior Matron for Infection Control	17.09.13	18.09.13	Y	Y
Trust Risk Leads	17.09.13			
Risk & Governance Manager (W&C)	17.09.13	17.09.13	N	N
Emergency Planning Manager	17-9-13	18-9-13	N	N
Occupational health Manager	17.09.13	17.09.13	Y	Y
Staff side chair	17.09.13			
Clinical Governance Assistant	17.09.13	26.09.13	Y	Y
Laundry Manager	17.09.13			
The role of those staff being consulted upon as above is to ensure that they have shared the policy for comments with all staff within their sphere of responsibility who would be able to contribute to the development of the policy.				

## APPENDIX THREE

### Equality Impact Assessment

In line with race, disability, and gender equalities legislation, public bodies like MTW are required to assess and consult on how their policies and practices affect different groups. They are also required to monitor any possible negative impact on equality.

The completion of the following Equality Impact Assessment grid is therefore mandatory and should be undertaken as part of the policy development and approval process. Please consult the Equality and Human Rights Policy on Datix Guidelines, for details on how to complete the grid.

**Please note that completion is mandatory for all policy development exercises. A copy of each Equality Impact Assessment must also be placed on the Trust's website.**

<b>Title of Policy or Practice</b>	Workplace Noise Policy and Procedure
<b>What are the aims of the policy or practice?</b>	Ensure safety of employees from excessive noise.
<b>Identify the data and research used to assist the analysis and assessment</b>	Noise at Work Regulations
<b>Analyse and assess the likely impact on equality or potential discrimination with each of the following groups.</b>	<b>Is there an adverse impact or potential discrimination (yes/no). If yes give details.</b>
Males or Females	No
People of different ages	No
People of different ethnic groups	No
People of different religious beliefs	No
People who do not speak English as a first language	No
People who have a physical disability	No
People who have a mental disability	No
Women who are pregnant or on maternity leave	No
Single parent families	No
People with different sexual orientations	No
People with different work patterns (part time, full time, job share, short term contractors, employed, unemployed)	No
People in deprived areas and people from different socio-economic groups	No
Asylum seekers and refugees	No
Prisoners and people confined to closed institutions, community offenders	No
Carers	No
<b>If you identified potential discrimination is it minimal and justifiable and therefore does not require a stage 2 assessment?</b>	
<b>When will you monitor and review your EqIA?</b>	Alongside this policy/procedure when it is reviewed.
<b>Where do you plan to publish the results of your Equality Impact Assessment?</b>	As Appendix 3 of this policy/procedure on the Trust approved document management database on the intranet, under 'Trust polices, procedures and leaflets'.