

Key Risk Area (KRA)

KRA 1.6 Noise Management

1. Purpose

This document provides direction for reducing, so far as is reasonably practicable, the risk to worker's hearing due to exposure to hazardous noise and or ototoxic substances in the workplace, including with reference to the SafeWork NSW Code of Practice: Managing noise and preventing hearing loss at work.

2. Scope

This Guideline applies to all health, safety and wellbeing activities of staff, students, visitors (including volunteers and contractors), Council members, and other persons interacting with the University of Newcastle (workers); the operations of staff of University aligned Research Centres and controlled entities; and all activities conducted by or on behalf of the University of Newcastle on and outside of the University's campuses.

3. Guidelines

3.1. Workplace Noise Exposure Assessment

An initial assessment of workplace noise should be made by inspection and observation. An indication of noise overexposure is where there is difficulty having a conversation between people at a distance of approximately one metre apart without raising their voices beyond a typical speaking volume.

An ototoxic substance is a chemical or material that can also cause hearing loss or exacerbate the effects of noise on hearing. A list of some common ototoxic substances is provided in Guideline [HSG 8.5 Health Monitoring and Immunisation](#), and potential exposure to ototoxic substances must be considered in the initial workplace noise assessment.

Where the readings from the noise level meter indicate there are noise exposures over the relevant exposure standard for noise limit, a noise survey will be arranged using an occupational hygienist. This will involve static or area monitoring and personal monitoring with selected Workers wearing noise dose meters for a typical shift. For further guidance

refer to Guidelines [HSG 3.3 Health and Safety in the Design of Infrastructure Projects](#) and [HSG 8.4 Workplace Exposure Monitoring](#).

A report will be submitted by the occupational hygienist to meet the content of a noise assessment report as set out in Appendix E of the SafeWork NSW Code of Practice: Managing noise and preventing hearing loss in the workplace.

Additional information can be obtained from:

- Designers, manufacturers, importers and suppliers who have a legal responsibility to provide appropriate information regarding the noise output of plant and equipment;
- Hazard reports; and
- Consultation with Workers.

3.2. Risk Controls

Where the noise levels exceed the relevant exposure standard for noise limits, reasonably practicable steps must be taken to eliminate or, if elimination is not reasonably practicable, minimise, the health and safety risks arising from such noise emissions. Methods of noise management are prioritised below according to the hierarchy of control measures. Workers who perform the work task should be consulted with regarding control measures.

The general Health and Safety Risk Assessment Form should be used to assess all hazards for University tasks in accordance with the Guideline [HSG 3.1 Health and Safety Risk Management](#). When considering risk controls for noise, the following risk controls should be considered as per the hierarchy of controls:

- Elimination - Eliminate the equipment or the task or change the way work is carried out so that hazardous noise is not produced.
- Substitution - Use alternative equipment that is quieter or replace ototoxic substances with other less harmful products.
- Isolation- Separate the Worker from the noise, such as by enclosing noisy machines in acoustic cladding or providing sound proof control rooms.
- Engineering controls - Make physical changes to the equipment to reduce noise, such as by replacing worn parts or reducing vibration.
- Administrative Controls - Adopt work procedures that minimise exposure to the noise to individuals e.g. job rotation; training; signage; audiometry programs.
- PPE - Provide personal hearing protector devices to protect hearing, such as earmuffs or earplugs. Hearing protection will be provided and must be worn where

there is a risk of noise induced hearing loss. Typically, this is associated with the use of equipment including sonicators and heavy machinery. Hearing protection must comply with AS/NZS 1269.3:2005 Occupational noise management - Hearing protector program.

3.3. Evaluation of risk controls

Ongoing evaluation and assessment of noise controls should be undertaken in consultation between Leaders/Supervisors and Workers directly involved in the work area identified as having a noise exposure. The results of this assessment should be communicated to relevantly interested parties. Evaluation can take place in the following ways (without limitation):

- Observation by Leaders/Supervisors, staff, Health and Safety Team members during visits to the area;
- During monthly site safety inspections; and
- During internal audits.

3.4. Consultation

Consultation on noise hazards should be undertaken between Leaders/Supervisors and Workers, including through direct discussion and the Health and Safety Committees. This consultation is to occur:

- As early as possible in the planning/design phase of the introduction of new or modified work areas, new plant and equipment, changed work arrangements that could impact exposure to noise or in the review of existing noise management strategies;
- When determining the approach and methods to be used in assessing noise hazards, and when decisions are being made on appropriate control measures;
- When the effectiveness of implemented control measures are being reviewed.

3.5. Audiometric Testing and Records

An audiometric testing program will be made available for Workers who are frequently required by the University to use PPE to protect them from the risk of hearing loss associated with exposure to hazardous, excessive noise levels.

The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team in consultation with the University's Occupational Health Provider must review the submitted Health Monitoring and Immunisation Assessment and determine if monitoring is required.

If required, the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team will refer the worker to the relevant medical practitioner or service provider who will book in the worker for their baseline appointment.

Health monitoring must be carried out either by, or under the supervision of, a registered medical practitioner with experience in health monitoring of the particular hazard. Such practitioners may be a single practitioner in a medical centre, occupational physician or specialists in areas such as respiratory screening and chest x-rays. The worker must be consulted in relation to the selection of the registered medical practitioner.

The University's audiometric testing program requires:

- An initial baseline test no later than three months after the commencement of work which exposes a person to hazardous noise, and then periodically every two years;
- Prior to audiometric testing, Workers will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form so the results of the tests can be made available to the College or Division;
- The test results and their implications will be explained to the Worker by the tester and if hearing deterioration is detected, the Worker will be advised to see their medical practitioner for further advice;
- The College or Division will be provided with a report that highlights any hearing deterioration detected and recommendations for improved exposure controls;
- Actions will be taken by the College or Division to ensure Workers with work-related hearing loss are able to work safely; and
- Workplace noise exposure monitoring and surveys, and audiometry records be kept in accordance with Guideline [HSG 7.1 Health and Safety Records and Document Control](#).

3.6. Training

All Workers, students and others who may be exposed to excessive noise or ototoxic substances at work should be given initial and ongoing training to promote an understanding of health effects caused by noise and ototoxic substances and the risk controls in place, including the need to use hearing protection. In addition to Workers, students and others exposed to noise in the workplace, persons responsible for designing, scheduling, and organising and layout of work should also attend training.

Training must cover the following:

- What noise is, the range of health effects due to noise and the social implications;
- The exposure to noise in the relevant workplace and work location;
- The general and specific control measures which are necessary to protect them and other persons who may be affected by their work;

- The requirements of this KRA;
- Arrangements for reporting defects likely to cause excessive noise;
- When and how to use personal hearing protection and the proper care and maintenance for such equipment; and
- The requirements of the SafeWork NSW Code of Practice: Managing noise and preventing hearing loss at work.

Competency assessment and identification and explanation of local noise minimisation requirements – including use of noise related PPE - is to be included in relevant Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and Facility inductions. Operator information and instruction must comply with the requirements of Guideline [HSG 4.2 Health, Safety and Wellbeing Induction, Training and Competency](#).

4. Definitions

In the context of the Health and Safety Management System Framework:

Employer	Means the University of Newcastle (the University).
Executive Committee	Consisting of the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellors, the Pro Vice-Chancellors, the Chief Operating Officer, Chief People and Culture Officer and the Chief Financial Officer, the University Secretary and the President of Academic Senate.
Hazardous noise	Noise that exceeds the exposure standard for noise in the workplace, as defined in the Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017 (NSW). The exposure standard for noise in the workplace is an average daily level of 85 decibels (A - weighted) across a duration of 8 hours in the workplace. For peak noise incidents (one-off noise events), the exposure standard for noise in the workplace is 140 decibels (C - weighted).
Leader / Supervisor	Any member of the University who is responsible for supervising staff and/or undergraduate or postgraduate students and/or for leading research projects.
Noise	Any sound that is audible to a person.
Ototoxic substance	A chemical or material that can also cause hearing loss or exacerbate the effects of noise on hearing.
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	Anything used or worn by a person to minimise risk to their health and safety, such as safety clothing, footwear, or equipment for specified circumstances or areas.
Worker	Includes an employee, conjoint, student on work experience, contractor, sub-contractor, and volunteer. A person is a worker if the person carries out work in any capacity for the University or another person conducting a business or undertaking, including work as: (a) an employee, or

	(b) a contractor or subcontractor, or (c) an employee of a contractor or subcontractor, or (d) an employee of a labour hire company who has been assigned to work in the person's business or undertaking, or (e) an outworker, or (f) an apprentice or trainee, or (g) a student gaining work experience, or (h) a volunteer, or (i) a person of a prescribed class.
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5. Responsibilities

A comprehensive list of health, safety and wellbeing responsibilities is provided in [HSG 1.2 Roles and Responsibilities Guideline](#).

Specific responsibilities under this Guideline include:

Leaders and Supervisors

- Facilitate statutory requirements to be complied with;
- Preference is given to purchasing items of equipment or plant that do not exceed the general exposure standard for noise limit of 85 dB(A) or 50dB (A) limit for laboratory, office and computing equipment;
- Noise control measures and management strategies are implemented whenever necessary;
- Ensure management and staff members and other Workers, students and visitors are aware of the control measures in place to reduce exposure to noise;
- All staff members and other Workers, students and visitors are directed to cooperate in using agreed safe work practices;
- Information on noise, the risks of exposure to noise and the appropriate control measures are readily accessible and disseminated in a manner appropriate to the workplace;
- A comprehensive personal hearing protection program, including the selection of personal hearing protectors, and instruction of Workers, students and visitors in their correct use and maintenance, is implemented;
- Workers, students and visitors receive appropriate training and education relating to hearing conservation when it is required;
- A Health Monitoring and Immunisation Assessment is completed for each position type that is recruited in their area (including casual appointments) and that excessive noise levels and/or any ototoxic substance use relating to the work area are included; and
- Audiometric baseline and ongoing testing occurs for Workers who are frequently required by the University to use personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect

them from the risk of hearing loss associated with exposure to hazardous, excessive noise levels, or from the use of ototoxic substances in their work area following advice from the University Occupational Health Provider.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team

- Provide advice to the University in regard to the particular requirements of noise and ototoxic substance hazards; and
- Support the University community in the selection, use, training, maintenance and disposal of PPE and protective clothing.

Workers

- Must comply with the requirement to use PPE when this is necessary for the work activities being undertaken, in accordance with information, instruction and training provided, and so far as they are reasonably able;
- Must not intentionally misuse or damage the PPE;
- Must inform the University of any identified damage to, defect in or need to clean or decontaminate the PPE;
- Attend instruction and training sessions relating to noise and ototoxic substance exposure when required; and
- Report any health and safety or compliance issues to the Leader / Supervisor in addition to lodging a report in the online Incident Hazard Reporting System (AIMS).

6. References & Related Documents

The following documentation is referenced in, or applicable to this Guideline:

[HSG 1.2 Roles and Responsibilities](#)

[HSG 3.1 Health and Safety Risk Management](#)

[HSG 3.3 Health and Safety in the Design of Infrastructure Projects](#)

[HSG 4.2 Health, Safety and Wellbeing Induction, Training and Competency](#)

[HSG 7.1 Health and Safety Records and Document Control](#)

[HSG 8.4 Workplace Exposure Monitoring](#)

[HSG 8.5 Health Monitoring and Immunisation](#)

[SafeWork NSW Code of Practice: Managing noise and preventing hearing loss at work](#)

7. Amendment History

Version	Date of Issue	Approval	Section(s) Modified	Details of Amendment
1	June 2015	Director, People and Workforce Strategy	-	Original version.
2	October 2023	CPCO	All	1. All sections reviewed for legal compliance 2. Updated content in all sections 3. Added new/renamed Related Documents 4. Added Amendment History 5. Amended document control header and footer

8. Appendices

Nil