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The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005

As the title suggests, these came put in 2005 - except for the entertainment industry which gained a delay till April 2008 to formulate its own guidance. The reasons are obvious: what we do for a living is make noise, so there had to be time to develop ways of implementing this in this sector.

The health consequences of being exposed to noise (or music as we like to call it) are well recognised - most musicians in particular are likely to have damage to their ear the further they get into their career. It's worth pointing out, too, that damage is done both by constantly being exposed to high or even reasonably high levels (is playing Wagner reasonable?) and by single episodes of very loud noise (think shell in the First World War, think pyros now). So it's definitely a problem worth doing something about, but of course the difficulties of implementing this in our industry are obvious.

The music industry, according to David Adams of the ABTT who has chaired two music committees (live and recorded music) for four (!) years on this subject, is now pretty much on top of it; it seems orchestras and pit bands are still struggling to find adequate means of noise reduction, for obvious reasons.

The legislation asks employers to assess the risks associated in the workplace with noise; wherever possible to eliminate those risks; where that isn't an option, to mitigate them as much as possible; and if there is still exposure above permitted levels after such actions, to provide protective equipment.

So your first action should not be to reach for the ear plugs, but to see if scheduling and re-arrangement of pits and other such measures can reduce the exposure.

Exposure is measured over an average 8 hour day and over the week, so it's not that you can't play Wagner, but just not every night - orchestras, as you might imagine, are finding they have to rearrange entire concerts and rehearsals.

PPE (that's Personal Protective Equipment) is also not an easy solution - ear plugs generally dampen all sound and therefore are highly irritating to the user. Which is why they'll probably take them out - leaving them completely unprotected again. But in fact there are certain frequencies that are more damaging than others, so someone has now developed sort of tunable ear plugs which will only cut out the nasty frequencies and also only down to the permitted level, so you don't get the blanket deafness - but this kind of stuff, natch, doesn't come cheap.

There is also a whole debate about how to measure the noise in the first place - it seems it's not that easy and you can get wildly differing readings by moving the meter by tiny amounts. In short, a whole can of worms lies under that innocuous-looking title 2005 Noise Regulations.

Exposure values are 80-87db (daily or weekly) and 135-140 db (peak exposure).

And just to cheer you all up, the next big thing will be exposure to bright light - there is a European directive on this already which should be implemented into UK Law by 2010.

For more information follow this link:

www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2005/20051643