

## Working safely with noise

---

Victoria's 13 existing occupational health and safety (OHS) regulations have been consolidated into a single, streamlined document.

Together with the modernised *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (the OHS Act), a new streamlined regulation will improve health and safety in Victoria by making it easier for employers and workers to understand their safety obligations, while at the same time cutting red tape and compliance costs.

In making the regulation, WorkSafe has focussed on removing duplication and improving consistency with National Standards.

People who comply with their obligations now will be well placed to comply with the new streamlined regulation.

The Victorian economy will benefit from a general reduction in compliance costs, and helping to reduce the number of people injured or killed at work will benefit the Victorian community.

### The risks of working with noise

Noise exposure is one of the most widespread hazards in the workplace with 19% of all disease-related claims made nationally in 2001-02 relating to hearing loss.

Reducing the incidence of industrial deafness is a national issue. Since 1993 Victorian employers have been subject to regulations that incorporate the key elements of a National Standard led by the Commonwealth Government.

### Key Issues

While noise-induced hearing loss is an irreversible condition, it is a preventable disease. The regulation generally incorporates the existing obligations with a new system to help workplace parties deal more efficiently with situations where there is little doubt about a noise risk.

The regulation will cut red tape, with a new emphasis on enabling employers and workers to focus their efforts on controlling rather than assessing risks.

### Exemption provision

Under the old Noise Regulations, employers were not able to apply for an exemption from the requirements of the regulations. This resulted in some difficulties. A provision has been inserted providing WorkSafe with the power to exempt a person or class of persons from complying with any provision of the Noise part of the regulations. As with other exemptions, an equivalent level of health and safety must be demonstrated before an exemption would be considered.

### **Mandatory testing only where there is uncertainty about noise risks**

Currently employers are required to assess noise levels regardless of whether they are clearly in excess of nationally accepted exposure standards, like when working with a jack-hammer.

This often results in employers spending considerable resources to test if the noise of an activity is above or below the exposure standards when there is little doubt about the noise risk. The time and expense of this testing could much better be spent on solutions.

Employers will only be required to test where there is uncertainty (based on reasonable grounds) about whether the exposure standard is being exceeded.

This change will enable employers to move immediately on to implementing appropriate controls in situations where they are certain that they have a noise problem.

Employers relying on hearing protection devices to control workers' noise exposure will need to take specific factors into account when selecting the hearing protectors, including noise levels and the duration of a worker's exposure to noise.

### **Further information**

This information sheet is a guide only. Further information, including web pages providing general advice on Victoria's new OHS Regulation, is available on the WorkSafe website, at [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au). To obtain hard copies please call WorkSafe on 1800 136 089.