Introduction

In addition to the procedures outlined within section 3.32 of the SPV Special Projects Ltd health & safety policy the following procedures shall apply.

Noise has been described as unwanted sound, which may be distracting, annoying or cause physical damage to the body (e.g., temporary, or permanent hearing damage).

The damaging effects of noise are related to the 'dose' that the ear receives, and this depends on the duration of the exposure and the noise level. Equal doses will cause the same amount of damage. Therefore, short exposure to elevated levels of noise will cause similar damage to lower levels of noise exposure that are of longer duration.

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 are intended to protect against risks to health and safety from exposure to noise, risk of hearing damage and other risks such as interference with the employee's ability to hear instructions or warnings.

This policy is designed to reflect the changes in these regulations which arise from an increasing knowledge about noise levels that cause hearing damage. The Regulations introduce new, lower levels at which employers must control noise exposure and include a new limit value, above which employers must take immediate action to reduce exposure.

The requirements for noise risk assessment and suitable control measures have been updated but remain broadly like existing requirements. However, the requirements for health surveillance have become more stringent since regular exposure above the revised upper exposure action value can pose a risk of hearing damage.

Exposure limits and action values

The strength of a noise source is usually measured in decibels, and these are abbreviated as dB. They are logarithmic units, this is because sound powers and so intensities, typical of various sources, cover a very wide range of values.

The annotation dB (A) means 'A-weighted', a measure of noise levels in the audible range for humans. A 'C-weighting', written as dB(C), is used to measure peak, impact or explosive noises. Both measures are important in relation to the exposure limits and action values.

The Regulations require action at specific values relating to the levels of noise exposure averaged over a working day or week, and the maximum noise (peak sound pressure) to which employees are exposed over a working day.

Lower exposure action values are:

- daily or weekly exposure of 80dB (A), (previously 85)
- peak sound pressure of 135dB(C)

Upper exposure action values are:

- daily or weekly exposure of 85dB(A), (previously 90)
- peak sound pressure of 137dB(C)

Use of a weekly exposure, rather than a daily exposure, may be proper where exposure to noise varies from day to day (e.g., the use of power tools on one day but not on others). No allowance should be made for the effects of hearing protection when deciding an employee's noise exposure in relation to the upper or lower action values.

Exposure limits have also been set which must not be exceeded:

- daily or weekly exposure of 87dB(A)
- peak sound pressure of 140dB(C)

In this case, account may be taken of the reduction in noise exposure afforded by hearing protection. However, if an employee is exposed to noise at or above the exposure limit values then branches must take immediate action to bring exposure down below this level.

Assessment of exposure

Work activities or processes where there is likely to be risk from noise exposure must be assessed by a competent person who should also Identify any likely detrimental health effects arising from an interaction between noise and other agents such as vibration.

If the assessor is satisfied that noise levels are below the first action value of 80dB (A) then this should be recorded. No further action is needed other than to ensure that there are no changes to the area, process, or activity, or to act if changes do arise.

Where assessment estimates approach the action values or exposure limit then suitable control measures should be employed in line with the hierarchy of control. Assessments may also be needed where noise becomes intrusive for most of the working day or where employees must raise their voices to hold a normal conversation two meters away from each other.

In all cases the assessment should be recorded and reviewed at least every year or when there is a meaningful change that may invalidate the original assessment.

Due to the nature of undertakings of the company in most cases noise measurements will not be necessary and sufficient information about noise emissions may be obtained from equipment manufacturers and suppliers.

Control of exposure

SPV Special Projects Ltd (SSP) should follow the hierarchy of control and where reasonably practical should put in place proper control measures to cut excessive noise exposure. Where this is not possible, reduce noise exposure risks with hearing protection being a last resort. As such the use of hearing protection is mandatory when using power tools known to breach the second action level regardless of the environment.

Hearing protection

Where employees are exposed to noise levels at or above 80db (A), but below 85db (A) the use of hearing protection is optional but encouraged by the company.

At or above exposures of 85db (A) the use of hearing protection becomes mandatory. SPV Managers must communicate this through the display of signage, at induction & any

other effective means. Where ear protection use is mandatory on site, this must be enforced: its use and those exposed must use it.

Careful consideration should be given to the choice of hearing protection as noise levels must be attenuated to less than 85dB (A) at the ear.

Hearing protection must be suitable for the environment, comfortable for the wearer and compatible with other personal protective equipment such as hard hats, respirators, or eye protection.

Hearing protection zones

Hearing protection zones should be appointed in any area for which hearing protection is needed, i.e., in areas where exposure to noise is above the upper action value of 85dB(A). The area must be clearly marked with suitable signs displayed to show that hearing protection is mandatory in these areas; this should also be communicated to all on site during induction.

Use and maintenance of noise control equipment

SPV Special Projects Ltd should check as a part of site inspections that noise control equipment and hearing protection is in good order and being effectively use. If any item is found to be defective the process should be stopped. The defective item removed from use and repaired or replaced before the work is allowed to continue.
Records of these checks and any maintenance should be recorded on inspection form and details transferred to the PPE record sheet in the Health & Safety Matrix kept at the head office.

New or hired in plant & equipment

All new plant and equipment bought or hired in should be designed and constructed to ensure that the noise produced is as low as possible with suppliers being first asked to supply information about noise emissions under actual working conditions.

Every attempt should be made to use only equipment with noise emissions below 85db (A), but if this is not possible the risk should be assessed, and risk control measures used.

Information, instruction, and training

The importance of training cannot be understated and in many cases the employee's exposure to noise will be decided by their diligence in using control measures and adhering to good practice.

Employees at risk from exposure to noise must understand the risk to their health, the control measures in place to control exposure and the importance of using these appropriately. Training records should be kept in line with Group procedure.

Information, instruction, and training on the risk to hearing from noise exposure are provided in SPV Special Projects Ltd Safety Awareness. This includes information about noise action levels, how noise affects the ear, noise exposure, hearing protection provided, where and how it should be used and the proper way to clean, store and support it.

Guide to Noise Levels

Activity	Approximate dB(A)
Quiet Office	50
Normal Conversation	60
Loud Radio	70
Busy Street	85
Cordless Drill	89
Electric Planer	89
Jig Saw	97
Mains Power Drill	100
Heavy Lorry (7m away)	100
Circular Saw	104
Road drill	110
Chain saw	120