



OPTIONS FOR CONTROLLING NOISE IN BARS AND CLUBS:

'Wanted' noise still damages:

Noise in the Entertainment Industry is inherently different to noise in other industries in that it is generally regarded as “wanted” noise as opposed to “unwanted noise”. Whether or not high sound levels result from using heavy machinery, or music, the fact remains that irreversible hearing damage may occur.



Your obligations are the same:

The fact that music noise may be wanted, changes neither the requirements for managing the hazard under sections 8 to 10 of the Health and Safety In Employment (HSE) Act nor the criteria for noise exposure and peak noise levels under regulation 11 of the Regulations.

There are several methods that can be used to control noise:

The HSE Act places duties on employers to control significant hazards by elimination where it is practicable to do so. Only where elimination is impracticable, or has been only partially successful at controlling the hazard, may the employer consider the next option in the hierarchy of controls – isolation.

If you can't eliminate – then think about isolation:

For noise, isolation generally involves the construction of a sound enclosure, or a partition to provide a level of protection to employees and others. It may also involve isolation in time, using the so-called “administrative” control of job rotation, which limits the time of exposure. Only where isolation has been considered and found impracticable, or only partially successful, may the employer consider the last resort – minimisation.

Minimisation is a last resort:

This option usually involves the use of personal protective equipment (hearing protection). Where minimisation is chosen as the strategy for controlling noise levels, the legislation also requires employers to monitor their employees' exposure to the hazard (i.e. conduct noise assessments) and their employees' health in relation to the hazard (i.e. conduct annual audiometry testing of exposed staff).

Work through the hierarchy of controls:

So, the hierarchy of controls must be worked through systematically to control the hazard. Whether the 'person' is the employer is not really the issue because those duties placed specifically on an employer amount to practicable steps that should be taken by other parties with duties under the HSE Act, such as persons who control a place of work, self-employed persons and principals.

Acting will save you money:

One factor that is likely to drive businesses towards compliance is the ACC levy system, which passes the cost of claims for noise-induced hearing loss to the industry groups concerned. It is in the entertainment industry's best interests, therefore, to control noise levels, both for the health benefit of their staff and patrons, as well as to reduce their running costs. There may also be a number of claims that result from the entertainment industry, but are attributed to other industries through an individual's primary employment.

Elimination strategies:

Turning the sound level down:

The human ear is not particularly good at detecting the differences in volume, particularly at higher sound levels. By way of example, a sound level of 97dB(A) – not unusual in nightclubs – delivers twice as much energy to the ear as one of 94dB(A), yet it doesn't appear twice as loud. While turning the sound level down may not be a practicable way to completely eliminate hazardous exposures, consideration must be given to at least partial elimination before moving on to consider isolation.

Isolation strategies:

Particularly at the time of design, or re-design, options for isolation include:

- fitting of an acoustic screen to shield bar staff from direct sound from a band or speakers
- fitting of acoustic absorption behind the bar to reduce reverberation
- fitting of acoustic doors and acoustic double glazing between the entertainment area and kitchen/office areas
- screening off of foyer areas with acoustic doors, to shield door staff from noise levels
- lining of walls with acoustic absorption to reduce reverberation
- in the case of discos/clubs, fitting of a 'sound ceiling' above the dance floor, with speakers directed downwards which can lower the sideways propagation by as much as 10dB.

Minimisation strategies:

As stated above, minimisation is a last resort option and if selected for the control of a significant hazard, must be accompanied by a programme of monitoring the employees' exposure to the hazard and their health in relation to the hazard with their informed consent. This means that in practical terms, it is a requirement to conduct noise assessments as per the Code of Practice for the Management of Noise in the Workplace, to carry out audiometry testing of exposed employees, and to provide the results of health monitoring to staff so that each individual has their own results, and sees that of the others, but grouped in such a way that individuals cannot be identified. Clearly, minimisation can be an expensive option.

Hearing protectors only work when fitted correctly:

The most common strategy for minimisation of a noise hazard is the fitting, and insistence on wearing of hearing protectors. This includes both earmuffs as well as earplugs – clearly earplugs, being less obtrusive, are a better option for this industry. However, hand-in-hand with the use of hearing protectors, goes the duty to ensure that they are worn correctly. This is particularly true for earplugs, which must be fitted using the correct technique, or else they do not provide for the level of protection indicated by the manufacturers.

To find out more visit: www.dol.govt.nz/itsnojoke

Accepted exposure times for noise before damage occurs	
Noise Exposure dB(A)	Duration per day before damage occurs
85	8 hours
88	4
91	2
94	1
97	30 min
100	15
103	8
106	4
109	2
115	30 secs

