



DOL AND ACC TEAM UP AGAINST NOISE

The Department of Labour and ACC have developed a joint work programme to reduce harm arising from workplace noise. This programme, still at an early stage, will be a long-term work programme. One of the key aims of this programme is to promote better noise management practices around how workplaces manage and reduce noise at source.

The Department and ACC will focus in the first instance on ensuring the standards and guidance for noise management are up to date, user friendly and easy to access.

For Department of Labour field offices, noise monitoring is an on-going activity. In the 2006/07 year, two offices looked beyond the traditional areas where noise might be considered a hazard – such as plants using heavy machinery – and ran pilot projects on noise in the entertainment industry.

Noise-induced hearing loss is one of ACC's four occupational health initiatives in priority industry sectors.

Case study: A tale of two cities

Nightclubs and bars can be bad for your health – and workers' health. Excessively loud music in employees' workplaces can potentially result in noise-induced hearing loss. This can be permanent and irreversible.

Department of Labour field staff carried out two separate investigations during 2006/07 to establish the noise levels that employees in the entertainment industry are exposed to. Our Nelson investigation was sparked by complaints alleging the potential for hearing damage. Our Hamilton trial was the result of Department of Labour staff being keen to trial ways of engaging with the industry.

In Nelson, the noise exposure was found to not be significant for employees who were part-time or casual. Positively, one bar owner already had their own noise level meter to monitor the bar and outside the premises. The Nelson City Council had previously worked with bar and nightclub operators on environmental noise, which is likely to have had a positive impact on noise levels and, most importantly, raised awareness of noise as a workplace hazard.

However, it was a different story in Hamilton, where over half the venues exceeded the noise exposure standard. Significantly, Hamilton businesses had not managed noise as a health and safety hazard before the project. The Department of Labour staff gave advice on how they should be managing their noise hazards and will follow up during 2007/08.

The projects demonstrate the necessary steps in managing any health and safety regime: building awareness through advice and education; forging relationships with businesses; using enforcement measures only where appropriate; and the effectiveness of local government and central government agencies working in tandem.