

HOW TO PREVENT NOISE INDUCED HEARING LOSS

The Health and Safety Executive estimate that more than 2 million people in the UK are exposed to unacceptable levels of noise at work. Once hearing is gone it will not come back, so it's important to know how to protect yourself and those working for you.

Noise on the farm and hearing loss can also make communication difficult and poses a health and safety risk, as you may not be able to hear warnings from others or approaching dangers.

This article will talk you through the causes of noise induced hearing loss and how to reduce the risk to yourself and others on farm.

Defining Noise Induced Hearing Loss

Often you won't notice that your hearing has been damaged as damage can accumulate over a long period of time from different noise sources. This damage can manifest as either a ringing in your ears (tinnitus) or deafness.

Noise induced hearing loss is hearing loss caused by exposure to high noise levels. Loud noises can damage the thousands of tiny hair cells in the inner ear. These hairs receive sound vibrations before transmitting them to the brain. Damage to these hairs is permanent and cannot be repaired, and any hearing loss as a result of that damage is permanent too. This damage is completely avoidable with the correct measures in place.

Causes of Noise Induced Hearing Loss on Farm

Farmers are often exposed to high noise levels from multiple sources such as:

- Machinery and equipment
- Power tools
- Livestock

Noise may be continuous, such as from a machine running constantly like a grain drier or fan, or sudden and one off, such as a loud bang in the workshop or a cow roaring.



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Reducing the Risk of Noise-Induced Hearing Loss

The best way to reduce the risk to yourself and others is to prevent and eliminate loud noises. Consider ways to reduce exposure to loud noises:

- Ensure machinery is maintained correctly.
- Fit a silencer to equipment where possible.
- Upgrade machinery or tools to a quieter version.
- Change the work pattern or layout of the workplace. Consider others around you when working with loud tools for example; do they need to be there while you operate the tool or machinery?
- Limit the time you are exposed to loud noises.
- Wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Is it possible to muffle some of the loud noises you are regularly exposed to? Could you pad gates and chains on livestock handling systems to prevent loud bangs? Could you install screens on barriers to absorb some of the noise of fixed equipment or in the workshop? Ensure cab windows are closed when operating loud machinery.

PPE for Loud Noise

PPE could include ear defenders, ear plugs or helmets with built in protection such as chainsaw helmets. Ear defenders or earmuffs should totally cover your ears with no gaps around the seals. Keep them clean and ensure a tight fit.

Earplugs may be the best choice in some situations, for example when you also need to wear a helmet or eye protection, but earplugs can be difficult to fit and won't provide much protection if they are not fitted properly. Some types of earplugs are single use, though others such as electronic noise cancelling earplugs are designed to be reused.

If PPE is to hand people are much more likely to use them! Have ear protection in multiple locations around the farm where they are needed, such as in the workshop and near loud fixed equipment. Keep them in boxes or sealed bags until you need them to keep them clean.

Further Information

HSE Noise at work publication
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg362.pdf

