

# “Serious gaps” found in protecting workers from excessive noise

Three-quarters of noisy workplaces lacked essential knowledge on maintaining hearing protection equipment, inspections have found.

The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) most recent inspection campaign has identified significant failings in workplace hearing protection, uncovering issues with employee training and equipment management.

One in four workplaces had noise levels requiring mandatory hearing protection, placing crucial responsibilities on employers to ensure proper provision and management of protective equipment. However, inspections revealed concerning gaps in implementation.

At high-noise workplaces, more than 75% of employees lacked essential knowledge about storing hearing protection, checking for damage, or reporting equipment faults to employers. Nearly two-thirds (63%) had not received [guidance](#) on the critical importance of wearing protection continuously during exposure to harmful noise levels.

Training deficiencies were particularly evident, with 80% of employees receiving no instruction on proper wearing techniques, including avoiding interference from hats and hoods, keeping hair clear of earmuffs, or ensuring compatibility with other personal protective equipment such as hard hats and eye protection.

Most significantly, 95% of employers had failed to verify whether workers wearing hearing protection could still detect vital warning signals, including fire alarms and vehicle reversing alerts.

Chris Steel, HSE's Principal Specialist Inspector, said: “The gaps that we found in implementation are serious. They place an added risk to workers of excessive exposure to noise when they may believe they are being protected.

“If your defence against workplace noise is to give your workers hearing protection then you need to check that it works. How confident are you that the hearing protection you have supplied is in good order, is being worn when it should be, how it should be, and that it is not stopping your workers from hearing warning signals?”

To address these issues, HSE is promoting the CUFF checking system to help employers assess hearing protection effectiveness.

The acronym covers Condition (equipment integrity), Use (proper deployment when needed), Fit the ear (correct wearing), and Fit for purpose (appropriate specification).

HSE specialists will deliver guidance at industry events and webinars, providing [practical advice](#) on implementing effective hearing protection

programmes and using the CUFF system to safeguard workers from noise-induced hearing damage.

Read a [feature piece](#) from HSE's Principal Specialist Inspector Chris Steel.