

USAR Equipment - Noise Management

Introduction

Current legislation, specifically the *Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005*, specifies the need for any employee who is subjected to noise sources to have that exposure controlled in order to keep exposure levels below pre-determined levels. Consequently, a hierarchy of controls exists:

- Eliminate the noise source.
- Substitute the noise source for one of a lower output.
- Engineering options to reduce the noise output of the tools.
- Management controls to monitor and reduce exposure time of operatives to noise sources.
- Personal protective equipment.

Whilst it is not realistic to eliminate all noise sources within a USAR environment, measures can be taken to address other options on the hierarchy list.

Within the range of USAR equipment, there are various options of saws, drills, breakers and other equipment available to USAR Technicians. Specific data regarding their noise outputs, although contained within the associated equipment risk assessment documents, is not readily available at the scene of operations.

Therefore, the noise management system provides USAR Technicians with an immediately available visual aid that will assist them in selecting the appropriate equipment for the task.

Noise Exposure Levels

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 stipulates the action levels for noise exposure. Currently these are:

Lower Exposure Action Level = 80dB.

Upper Exposure Action Level = 85dB.

Both figures are time weighted averages over an 8 hour period. Suitable and appropriate controls must be implemented when these action levels are reached and/or exceeded.

Date	Status	Document Number	Version	Page
July 2008	Completed	ND_USAR_SOP_HAS004	1.0	Page 1 of 2

Noise Management System

Supervisory officers must manage the provision and use of appropriate hearing protection and ensure that crews are regularly rotated so as to avoid prolonged noise exposure. To assist in this task, USAR equipment that emits a vibration and/or noise output is provided with labels as part of the Noise and Vibration Management System.

The labels are colour coded (Green, Amber/orange, Red and Yellow) dependant on the level of vibration output they emit. The label itself contains information regarding:

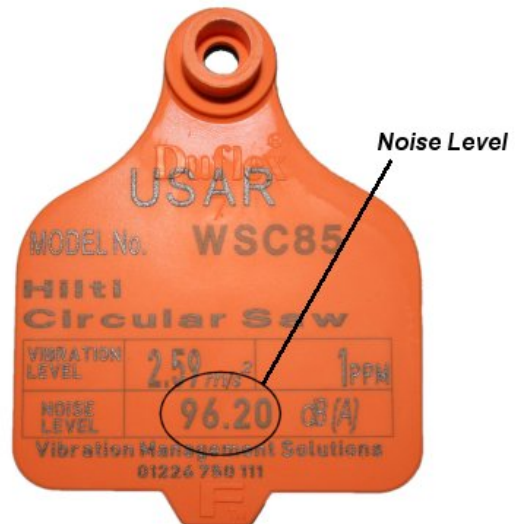
- The model and name of the equipment.
- The noise output in dB.

The provision of the noise output information on the equipment label enables USAR Technicians and supervisory officers to make better informed choices about the equipment chosen to complete a task.

It is important to note however, that lower noise output is not the single deciding factor. For example, deciding which breaker to use for a specific task: the DeWalt breaker has a lower noise output (99.1dB), but it may actually take longer to complete the task and consequently subject the operator to a prolonged exposure to noise. The Stanley breaker may be louder (108.3dB), but might complete the task in a much shorter time, thus reducing the total amount of noise the operator is exposed to.

There is a requirement to manage and record exposure to noise. Information concerning any specific item of equipment is provided in the relevant Hazard Analysis/Risk Assessment document. The log book provided is only for recording vibration exposure and cannot be used for recording exposure to noise.

A hard copy list of all the noise values for each item of equipment on the USAR modules is provided with the labels. This is to act as a reference in the event of labels becoming lost or damaged.



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Date	Status	Document Number	Version	Page
July 2008	Completed	ND_USAR_SOP_HAS004	1.0	Page 2 of 2