The construction industry is a high-risk industry for noise-related ill health. Many construction processes are noisy. If you must raise your voice to have a normal conversation when standing about 2 meters apart for at least part of the day, then noise levels on the site may be at a level which could damage health. There could also be a problem if there are sudden extremely loud noises on the site, such as from cartridge operated tools, or if at the end of the day you notice that your hearing is muffled, or your ears are ringing. Quality of life can be badly affected by noise induced hearing loss. Affected people may find that:

- Conversation becomes difficult or impossible.
- They have trouble using the telephone.
- They find it difficult to catch sounds like ‘t’, ‘d’, and ‘s’, confusing similar words.
- They may suffer from permanent tinnitus (ringing, whistling, buzzing or humming in the ears) which can be a distressing condition and can lead to other problems, including depression and loss of sleep.
- Their family complains about the television being too loud.

Eliminating noisy processes or substituting them for a less noisy process are the best ways of dealing with noise on a construction site. If it is not possible to remove workers from the noisy area then choosing quieter equipment can also be effective. As a last resort, hearing protection and hearing protection zones may be appropriate. Ways noise can be reduced include:

- Eliminate noise during design.
- Substitute a less noisy process.
- Remove workers from the vicinity of noisy work.
- Select quiet equipment.

It is not the best practice to rely on hearing protection alone to control noise exposure. Hearing protection should only be used when extra protection is needed above what has been achieved by noise control techniques such as elimination of noisy tasks, substituting quieter processes, removing workers from noisy areas and selection of quiet equipment. If protection is still required after taking these measures:

- Make sure the protection provided gives enough protection – aim to get below 85 db at the ear, but don’t provide excessive protection as protectors which cut out too much noise causing isolation or an unwillingness to wear them.
- Target the use of protectors to the noisy tasks and jobs in a working day.
- Select protectors which are suitable for the working environment – consider how comfortable and hygienic they are.
- Think about how they will be worn with other protective equipment such as hard hats, dust masks, and eye protection.
- Provide a range of protectors so that workers can choose ones which will work best for them.
- Make sure workers are trained on how and when to use the hearing protectors.

Have your hearing checked each year and wear the hearing protection provided by your employer. Many workers are afraid they won’t hear warning signals or coworkers if they wear their hearing protection. But, all should be aware that some new protectors can let in voices and block other noises.

Download the recording form here.