



Noise

What is the issue?

Noise in the dairy and around the farm, and its effect on human hearing.

Why is it an issue?

Many farmers suffer some level of noise-induced deafness. Often, they have made no attempt to control noise around the farm, as it's seen as simply a 'fact of life' when machinery is being used.

What are the consequences of ignoring it?

Hearing damage due to excessive noise is permanent and cannot be repaired, and it can affect the way we communicate with others. Both loud noise and hearing loss could increase our exposure to other hazards, such as approaching traffic and machinery, because we can't hear them properly.

It is useful to find out whether you have already experienced some hearing loss. Hearing (audiometric) tests are widely available and can accurately determine existing damage.

There is a legislative obligation to provide regular audiometric testing to employees exposed to high or persistent noise levels.

How safe is your dairy now?

It can be difficult to recognise how noisy a dairy is when you have been working in that environment for a long time.

Noise is measured in decibels (db) and levels greater than 85db for more than eight hours can cause hearing loss. Each 3db increase in noise levels halves the time taken to cause damage.

Generally, a dairy has an excess noise problem if it is necessary to raise your voice to speak to a person face-to-face. A more accurate measurement of noise levels can be taken using a simple electronic noise meter that can be bought from electronic stores for less than \$100.

Try testing the noise level in the place where you spend most of your time, such as in the pit, or at the cups on or cups off position.

Don't forget about other sources of noise around the farm, including chainsaws, tractors, pumps, small engines, angle grinders and compressors.

What can be done right now?

A good way to start tackling the noise problem is to identify the possible causes. Take a walk around the dairy with the meter and identify the equipment that is creating significant noise.

Some common sources of excessive noise are:

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- vacuum pumps and milking equipment;
- augers, grain crushers and hammer mills;
- poorly maintained equipment; and
- the radio (if you can reduce the noise level of the main sources you won't have to have the radio so loud).

If you find that you do have a problem where you are milking or working, and there is no quick way to stop the noise being created, you should wear hearing protection while working out the next step.

Ensure you provide and use suitable and comfortable hearing protection, i.e. earmuffs or plugs that meet the relevant Australian Standard and have a suitable noise reduction rating.

Store the equipment in a place everyone knows and has ready access to, so that no-one has an excuse for not using it.

Use signs in noisy areas to remind employees (and yourself!) to use hearing protection.

The regular maintenance or replacement of all hearing protection is a must if it is to remain effective.

What are the next steps?

Re-organise the dairy to reduce noise levels. For instance:

- redirect vacuum pump exhaust away from working areas or dampening it;
- surround the vacuum pump with an insulated enclosure;
- use sound absorption panelling, where possible;
- move noisy equipment away from the working area or metal surfaces, especially corrugated iron walls; and
- establish regular maintenance routines according to the manufacturer's guidelines for vacuum pumps and other dairy equipment .

Finally, you should regularly measure and monitor the noise levels in the dairy. If you suspect a problem, try seeking the help of a professional.

What you should be considering longer term

Next time you buy new machinery, consider how much noise it makes. Before buying, ask the seller the following types of questions:

- Does it pose any noise risk to the operator?
- Are there quieter models available?
- Does it need to be put in a special noise-reducing structure?



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- Is a maintenance contract included in the purchase price?

Victorian sellers are required to provide you with information about the possible hazards involved with the installation, use and maintenance of new plant, and that includes noise. If that type of information is not available because the plant is second hand, contact the manufacturer and ask for a manual.

What actions are not optional

There are noise regulations that require you to act to control noise hazards. If an employee has to wear Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), these regulations require you to provide them with audiometric testing within three months of starting work and then every two years. Records of these tests need to be kept for the period of employment and 20 years thereafter.

These regulations also require you to provide sufficient information, instruction, training and supervision for your employees to work in a safe and healthy manner.

Where to go for more information

Hearing tests

Audiological Society of Australia Consumer information	www.audiology.asn.au
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Noise regulations and who can conduct hearing tests

WorkSafe Victoria Noise Regulations	www.worksafe.vic.gov.au
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Further information about noise on farms

WorkSafe Western Australia Noise and vibration	www1.safetyline.wa.gov.au
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How noise affects our hearing, fact sheet, and ear muffs or plugs what to use

Farmsafe Australia Noise	www.farmsafe.org.au
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