

## Potential Hearing Loss on PCC's

March 2012

Over the last two decades, as a company, we have seen the nature, number and value of personal injury claims and awards which we have been involved in change and develop. Those injuries range from immediate skeletal damage, to those which are incubated over a longer time scale such as mesothelioma, vibration white finger and, more recently, loss of hearing.

It is the nature of our work that we attend all sorts of different ship types worldwide, and we are seeing an increase of appropriate signage regarding hearing protection to be worn in machinery spaces. We have noticed however, that on the cargo decks of most vessels, and in particular car carriers, generally nobody uses such protection. In car carriers there is a lack of on deck signage despite the sharp "cracks" of flexing decks and squealing of tyres caused by cars cornering on steel decks, in addition to the persistent background noise from ventilation fans and car engines.

The allowable limits as per the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 (relates to all industry sectors in Great Britain and has done so since April 6<sup>th</sup> 2006) states, the level at which employers must provide hearing protection is 85 decibels (daily or weekly average exposure) and the level at which employers must assess the risk to workers' health and provide them with information and training is now 80 decibels, see <http://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/regulations.hym>



Over a period of more than twelve months we recorded background noise on numerous different car carriers, at different ports in a number of different countries, and we found that these noise levels could easily surpass 80db and peak levels often exceeded 100 db.

Obviously ships, particularly foreign flagged ones, operate under different regulations to those of the UK HSE, and the crew on board are not always covered by UK HSE legislation. We are also aware that we did not carry out a scientific examination of each of the ships we attended, spending hours calibrating and positioning 10's or even 100's of sensors. What we do know is that we used a hand held monacor SM-1 unit accurate to +/-3.5 db, and that we value our own hearing, which is why we insist our employees wear hearing protection on car decks during cargo operations.



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It has to be for each shipowner/operator to determine whether an issue exists with noise levels on his/her own ship, in respect of all persons, (crew, stevedores, surveyors, agents etc) working on the car decks. We would have thought signage at the entry points and availability of ear protection would have been sufficient to demonstrate a reasonable duty of care to those working on the ship.

There is a concern that persons on car decks could be run over due to not hearing vehicles approaching. As everyone on the working area must be wearing high visibility clothing, with the cars proceeding at an appropriate speed, in our opinion this should not really be a problem. Further as more electric cars are shipped, which make little or no noise when being driven, individuals will not be able to hear them approaching with or without hearing protection, unless their horns are sounded, which are quite loud.....

It is also worth noting that we have not attended any cross channel ferries recently, but from memory of when our staff worked on these vessels hearing protection was not worn then either.

It is possible to hire or purchase noise monitoring equipment for personnel (See link below), so that the actual environmental conditions can be recorded and assessed.

<http://www.noisemeters.co.uk/>

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