

Policy Statement and Guidance: Laboratory Safety - Headphones

POLICY STATEMENT

Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) recognises that many staff and students use audio equipment (audio-visual & multi-media production etc) and other devices (MP3 players, iPods, etc) with headphones / earphones / earbuds during work and study. The use of audio equipment with headphones / earphones / earbuds in hazardous areas such as laboratories or workshops can increase the risks to health and safety of staff and students. This document identifies where restrictions are necessary for health and safety to minimise risk and where they may be permitted, with a risk assessment of the activity.

GUIDANCE

The following points should be considered by all QMUL staff and students to minimise the potential health and safety impacts associated with the use of audio headphones / earphones / earbuds, whilst working within a laboratory or workshop:

- If the wearer's situational awareness is reduced to the extent that their health and safety is compromised by the use of these devices then they must not be used (see specific restrictions below).
- The use of high volumes can cause permanent noise-induced hearing loss. If someone standing nearby can hear what the wearer is listening to, then the volume is too loud.
- Staff and students should consider using a single earpiece whenever possible, to assist in maintaining awareness of what is happening around them.
- Headphones / earphones / earbuds should be maintained in a clean and hygienic state to avoid cross-contamination. It is important to follow the manufacturer's instructions when cleaning these devices due to the potential for damage to the electrical / electronic components contained in the unit.

ACTIVITIES REQUIRING THE USE OF HEADPHONES / EARPHONES / EARBUDS

- A risk assessment must be completed prior to any activities which require the use of headphones/earphones/earbuds. This is especially important in laboratories, workshops, studios or any other area where harmful biological, chemical or other substances and materials are used e.g. infectious or toxic substances, metal particles etc.
- If a risk assessment indicates there is no alternative but to use the headphones / earphones / earbuds, then approval must be obtained from area managers / supervisors etc., prior to the use of any such items in the workplace.
- Headphones / earphones / earbuds must be stored in such a way that minimizes the risk of them being contaminated by biological, chemical or other hazardous substances and materials.
- Ideally, external units such as headphones and earphones should be single user. Where this is not practical, it is important to ensure that the units are cleaned according to manufacturer's instructions prior to transfer between individuals.
- Headphones / earphones / earbuds must not be repeatedly touched, adjusted or re-fitted to the ear where there is risk of contamination from biological, chemical or other hazardous substances and materials.

RESTRICTIONS IN SPECIFIC AREAS, EQUIPMENT AND SITUATIONS

- If the wearer's situational awareness is reduced to the extent that their health and safety is compromised by the use of audio devices with headphones / earphone / earbuds then they must not be used if they cannot hear the fire alarm, fume cupboard alarms, safety cabinet alarms, oxygen depletion monitors. they cannot hear collision warnings from colleagues when carrying hazardous substances. it were it is possible to introduce chemical/biological/radio-isotope contamination into the ear canals. reduced response times to hazardous events within the laboratory is possible
- Headphones / earphones / earbuds should not be used in Containment Level 3 or 2 laboratories, radio-isotope handling laboratories or in laboratories / workshops where equipment use requires the user to hear for operation and/or safety.
- *Noise cancelling or reducing* headphones / earphones / earbuds should not be used in laboratories or workshops.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Please see local laboratory rules / induction information for your Area/School/Department/Institute.
- Health & Safety Directorate <http://hsd.qmul.ac.uk/Risk%20Assessment/index.html>
- HSE <http://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/regulations.htm>