

Ear defenders

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Owner: **Assistant Director, Health, Safety and Wellbeing**
Responsible work team: **Health and Safety**

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1 Scope

- 1.1 This policy describes the technical specifications for ear defenders and how they are to be used and maintained.

2 References

- 2.1 The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, Sections 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8.
- 2.2 The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and Approved Code of Practice L21.
- 2.3 The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 and Guidance L108 (second edition 2005) with internal Policy number 213 – Control of noise at work.
- 2.4 The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 and Guidance L22 with internal Policy number 598 - Provision and use of work equipment (acquisition of new machinery and use of work equipment).
- 2.5 The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, as amended by The Quarries, Miscellaneous Health and Safety Provisions Regulations 1995 and Approved Code of Practice and Guidance L24.

3 General guidance

- 3.1 Ear protection must be worn 100% of the time in the situations described in Appendix 1 in Policy number 213 – Control of noise at work (reference 2.3 above). This is the only way that hearing can be protected, proper use and maintenance of hearing protection is essential to prevent noise-induced hearing damage. Without adequate protection, the sensitive hair cells and receptors within the inner ear can become permanently damaged, leading to irreversible hearing loss. This can occur if hearing protection is removed for even a short period of time spent in noisy situations.
- 3.2 There are exceptional circumstances when wearing hearing protection may produce an increased risk due to the inability to hear warnings or other sounds in the immediate environment. In these situations, it is recommended that hearing protection is limited to those people most at risk, e.g. the person using a particular tool. Others in the near vicinity will need to be aware of the environment and be prepared to warn the person wearing hearing protection by either shouting, physical contact, or agreed procedures prior to activity.
- 3.3 The Brigade's competent person is aware of operational working conditions and has held discussions with station personnel and has identified hearing protection that incorporates human voice attenuation to ensure communication can be maintained.

Appendix 1 – Ear Ultrafit 20 ear defenders

General information

- 1 These ear defenders comply with EN 352-2:2020, have an ergonomic design and are of a one-size-fits-all pattern.
- 2 These ear defenders are compatible with the helmet used in the Brigade's PPS.
- 3 The concerns of operational personnel regarding their ability to hear instructions and/or warning have been taken into account and these ear defenders incorporate a facility to allow voice attenuation, although there will be some reduction in overall volume.
- 4 The ear defenders are joined by a fluorescent yellow plastic cord. This cord is to be worn so that it hangs under the wearers chin and is therefore visible to managers as a confirmation that ear defenders are in place.

Risks which are protected by using these ear defenders

- 5 These ear defenders have been assessed against a variety of noise sources and have reduced the level of damaging high frequencies of individual sound patterns. The activities where these ear defenders are fit for purpose are mentioned in the appendix of Policy number 213 – Control of noise at work.

Risks which are not protected by using these ear defenders

- 6 These ear defenders cannot be guaranteed to give suitable protect against any noise hazard that has not been assessed by the Brigade's competent person for noise assessment.

Risks that may be increased due to the wearing of ear defenders

- 7 When ear defenders are being worn the volume of speech will be reduced. When talking to personnel wearing ear defenders ensure you have their attention and speak face to face. Personnel wearing ear defenders "naturally" speak louder but personnel talking to individuals wearing ear defenders must talk to them about twice as loudly as they would normally expect to do. All personnel must ensure that their radio volume is turned higher than it would normally be used at to ensure it is heard: managers should be prepared to send a runner to confirm a message has been received if there is doubt over its receipt.

Carrying, cleaning, inspection and replacement of ear defenders

- 8 The ear defenders are issued in a cardboard container. This is to be kept inside the sealable plastic bag supplied separately. The ear defenders are to be kept in this plastic bag at all times when not in use. Ear defenders are to be kept in the same pocket as the personal protection pack.
- 9 The fluorescent cord has two cylindrical connectors, one at each end. The individual ear defenders are to be connected to the cord by pushing the finger holds into the cylinders.
- 10 The ear defenders provided are made of a hypoallergenic material that can be cleaned in normal soap and water and allowed to dry naturally (do not use detergents such as washing up liquid). The ear defenders may be cleaned up to 50 times; however, if they remain soiled after cleaning they are to be discarded. If an individual uses a special soap due to a pre-existing medical condition this should be used to clean the ear defenders.

- 11 The ear defenders should be inspected after use/cleaning to ensure that there is no visible damage or deterioration to their structure. The plastic finger holds contain a conductive strand (visible as a red dot in the end of the finger hold) if this begins to work its way out it can be pushed back into the finger hold until it is flush with the end. If the conductive strand is missing the ear defenders are to be discarded. If the cord becomes broken it can be tied back to itself, if the cord breaks more than three times the ear defenders are to be discarded.
- 12 Ear defenders that are no longer serviceable do not constitute a biohazard. They should be put into their carrying packet and disposed of with normal domestic rubbish. The plastic bag should be reused.
- 13 Lost/defective ear defenders are to be reported to the officer in charge and a replacement provided from station stock.

Action if discomfort is experienced when wearing ear defenders

- 14 The correct method of inserting the earplugs is shown on the cardboard packet the ear defenders are originally packed in. These instructions are to be followed at all times.
 - To insert the ear defender, pull the top of the ear up and slightly towards the back of the head. This is to straighten the ear canal.
 - Holding the finger hold with the thumb and forefinger insert the ear defender into the ear canal with a slight twisting motion.
 - The ear defender must end in the position illustrated on the pack marked with a ✓.
- 15 Some people may experience discomfort when wearing ear defenders. Initially this may be simply due to the fact that they are not used to having something inside their ear. However, if discomfort persists the individual is to make an appointment to visit their own doctor/practice nurse and, taking their ear defenders with them, explain the discomfort they are experiencing. In many cases this discomfort will be due to excessive earwax which can be removed. Individuals' are required to inform their officer in charge if they are experiencing discomfort, but there is no need for them to be removed from operational duties while this is being investigated.
- 16 If problems persist their officer in charge will arrange for them to attend the OHU to discuss the matter with one of the Brigade's occupational health practitioners. If the problem cannot be addressed by the occupational health practitioner, they will refer the individual (with details of the problem) to the Brigade's competent person for noise measurement to establish if an alternative ear defender is needed. Again, there is no need for an individual to be withdrawn from operational duties while this is being investigated.
- 17 Individuals who experience discomfort are not to wear ear defenders until the matter is resolved. While they cannot wear ear defenders, they are to reduce their noise exposure as far as is practicable by avoiding exposure during the activities where ear defenders are required.

Station/Fire Safety team stock

- 18 Stations and Fire safety team offices are to maintain a 100% stock of ear defenders and plastic bags for their establishment. Stocks are to be replenished when stocks fall below 25% (ear defenders order one box of 50 bags. Order sufficient for the establishment).
- 19 SAP references
 - Ear defenders Ultrafit 20 – S2981 (box of 50).
 - Plastic resealable bag – S2982 (issued as an individual item).

Appendix 2 - Ear defenders – ear muffs – Peltor ProTac MT15H7

General information

- 1 This ear defenders complies with EN 352-2:1993, they have an ergonomic design and are of a one-size fits all pattern. This ear defender has separate full stereo through double microphones for ambient noise, plus amplifiers and earphones in the cups. The headset is tested and approved according to PPE These ear defenders are not compatible with the firefighting helmet used in the Brigade's PPS, therefore they **must** be worn with the provided bump hat and, when appropriate, separate eye protection.
- 2 The concerns of operational personnel regarding their concern regarding the ability to instructions and/or warning have been taken into account and these ear defenders incorporate an active voice facility to allow the wearer comfortable contact with your surroundings (to hear external voice communications, including radio communications) while effectively protecting from harmful noise levels.
- 3 As these ear defenders are worn with a different helmet managers will be able to use this as a visible confirmation that ear defenders are in place.

Risks which are protected by using these ear defenders

- 4 These ear defenders have been assessed against a variety of noise sources and have significantly reduced the level of damaging high frequencies of individual sound patterns. The activities which require ear defenders to be worn are mentioned in the appendix of Policy number 213 - Control of noise at work

Risks which are not protected by using these ear defenders

- 5 These ear defenders cannot be guaranteed to give suitable protection against any noise hazard that has not been assessed by the Brigade's competent person for noise assessment.

Risks that may be increased due to the wearing of ear defenders

- 6 When ear defenders are being worn the active voice characteristics should not result in any noticeable degradation of the volume of speech. However, it is good practice when talking to personnel wearing ear defenders ensure you have their attention and speak face to face. Personnel wearing ear defenders "naturally" speak louder but personnel talking to individuals wearing ear defenders must talk to them about twice as loudly as they would normally expect to do. Managers wearing ear defenders must ensure that their radio volume is turned to maximum: but be prepared to use a runner to confirm a message has been received if there is doubt over its receipt.

Carrying, cleaning, inspection and replacement of ear defenders

- 7 These ear defenders are to be stored, in accordance with the local arrangements. Do not leave the headset in places where temperatures could exceed +55°C, for example on the dashboard behind a vehicle windscreen. They are to subject to inspection at the beginning of each day. This will include a visual inspection to ensure that the helmet and headband are serviceable and that the ear cushions are not damaged. The battery should be tested by turning on the ear defenders using the on/off button and listening for one minute. Three tones are emitted every 30 seconds indicating low battery power and the batteries need to be replaced, see paragraph 9 below.

- 8 To replace the batteries, unscrew the locking screw and open the battery cover. Use two 1.5 Volt AA batteries. Make sure that the + and the – poles of the battery are in the correct position (see the figure in the cover). If batteries are not replaced when the tones are emitted the unit switches off automatically after five minutes. Batteries will give an expected life of 270 operating hours.
- 9 If the ear defenders become dirty it is permissible to clean the outside of the headset with soap and warm water. Do not immerse in these ear defenders in fluids.
- 10 It is critical that the ear cushions remain undamaged. Any splits, cracks or permanent deformation of the ear cushion indicates that it may not protect the wearer and the cushions should be replaced. The ear cushions should be replaced every six months, in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations to ensure they perform correctly.
- 11 These ear defenders are not personal issue but may be used by a number of people. To remove fears of infection, hygienic single use protectors that are applied directly to the ear cushion are provided. These should be changed after each use to ensure they are immediately ready the next time they are needed.
- 12 Ear cushions and hygienic protectors do not constitute a biohazard. They should be disposed of with normal domestic rubbish.
- 13 These ear defenders are not a station stock item. Lost/defective ear defenders are to be reported to the officer in charge.

Using these ear defenders

- 14 For the best protection, brush aside hair around the ears so the cushions fit snugly against the head. Only approved safety spectacle should be used with the helmet/ear defender combination.
- 15 Adjust the cups so that the ears are completely surrounded by the ear cushions.
- 16 Adjust the height using the headband until you have a snug, comfortable fit.
- 17 Fasten the helmet to ensure the whole assembly is held in place.

Equipment allocation

- 18 This equipment is allocated to training schools for use by the trainers for the purpose of forced entry equipment (FEE) training.

Stock

- 19 FEE locations are to maintain one set of hygiene kits (replacement attenuation cushions and snap in cushions) and a reserve of one pack of clean – single use protectors per set of ear defenders.
- 20 SAP references:
 - Ear defenders Peltor Pro Tac MT15HZP3ESV helmet attachment
 - Pack of clean – single use – protectors (HY100)
 - Hygiene kits (HY79)
 - Helmet – Pacific WR55 Red Bds LFB en 397
 - Eye Protection – UVEX ultrasonic goggle 9302685

Document history

Assessments

An equality, sustainability or health, safety and welfare impact assessment and/or a risk assessment was last completed on:

EIA	30/03/26	SDIA	L – 26/02/26	HSWIA	12/02/26	RA	N/A
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Audit trail

Listed below is a brief audit trail, detailing amendments made to this policy/procedure.

Page/para nos.	Brief description of change	Date
Throughout	Reviewed as current with no changes.	30/07/2018
Throughout	References to 'the Authority' changed to 'the Brigade' to reflect the changes in organisational structure and governance due to the abolition of LFEPA.	14/10/2020
Throughout	Reviewed as current with no changes.	06/07/2022
Throughout Page 2, para 3.1 - 3.2	Reviewed as current. Minor wording amendment to ensure clear and concise.	31/03/2026

Subject list

You can find this policy under the following subjects.

Ear defenders	Equipment – protective
Noise	

Freedom of Information Act exemptions

This policy/procedure has been securely marked due to:

Considered by: (responsible work team)	FOIA exemption	Security marking classification