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Acoustics — Estimation of noise-induced hearing loss

Acoustique — Estimation de la perte auditive induite par le bruit



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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2. www.iso.org/directives

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The committee responsible for this document is ISO/TC 43, *Acoustics*.

This third edition cancels and replaces the second edition (ISO 1999:1990), of which it constitutes a minor revision.

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Introduction

This International Standard presents, in statistical terms, the relationship between noise exposures and the “noise-induced permanent threshold shift” (NIPTS) in people of various ages. It provides procedures for estimating the hearing loss due to noise exposure of populations free from auditory impairment other than that due to noise (with allowance for the effects of age) or of unscreened populations whose hearing capability has been measured or estimated. NIPTS is treated here as an additive term independent of other components of hearing threshold levels. For any given noise exposure, it has a range of positive values representing the variability of noise-damage susceptibility between individuals of a population.

Persons regularly exposed to noise can develop hearing loss of varying severity. Due to this hearing loss, their understanding of speech, perception of everyday acoustic signals, or appreciation of music may be impaired. With the exception of exposure to blast, high-impulse noise and extremely high levels of steady noise, permanent impairment of the hearing organ takes time and is progressive over months, years, or decades of exposure. NIPTS is usually preceded by a reversible temporary effect on hearing called noise-induced “temporary threshold shift” (TTS). The severity of TTS and recovery from it depend upon exposure level and duration. For a single individual, it is not possible to determine precisely which changes in hearing threshold level are caused by noise and which changes are caused by other factors, although, in doubtful individual cases, the data in this International Standard might provide an additional means for estimating the most probable causes in audiological diagnosis. However, for a large population exposed to a specific noise, changes in the statistical distributions of hearing threshold levels can be determined. Parameters, such as the mean NIPTS and the median NIPTS, can be used to describe differences in hearing threshold levels between two populations that are similar in all relevant respects except that one population has had a well-defined (usually occupational) noise exposure. Throughout this International Standard, the term NIPTS is applied to changes in the noise-induced permanent threshold shift of statistical distributions of groups of people; it is not to be applied to individuals.

This International Standard can be applied to the calculation of the risk of sustaining hearing loss due to regular occupational noise exposure or due to any daily repeated noise exposure. In some countries, hearing loss caused by occupational noise exposure can have legal consequences with respect to responsibility and compensation. The hearing threshold level at the various frequencies, at which a hearing impairment is deemed to exist (fence), depends not only on the hearing loss per se, but frequently on legal definitions and interpretations based on social and economic considerations. In addition, the definition of a hearing impairment depends on the quality of speech recognition desired, the average level of background noise, and with respect to the relative importance of the various frequencies, perhaps even on the language. Consequently, this International Standard does not stipulate (in contrast to the first edition of ISO 1999) a specific formula for assessment of the risk of impairment, but specifies uniform methods for the prediction of hearing loss, which can be used for the assessment of impairment according to the formula desired or stipulated in a specific country. The results obtained by this International Standard may also be used for estimating the permanent effects of noise on the perception of everyday acoustic signals, the appreciation of music, or the effect of one specific frequency not necessarily stipulated by a hearing impairment formula.

Since noise-induced hearing loss is the result not only of occupational noise exposure but also of the total noise exposure of the population, it may be important to take the non-occupational exposure of individuals (during commuting to and from their jobs, at home, and during recreational activities) into account. Only if this non-occupational exposure is negligible compared with the occupational exposure does this International Standard allow prediction of the occurrence of hearing loss due to occupational noise exposure. Otherwise, it should be used to calculate the hearing loss to be expected from the combined (occupational plus non-occupational) total daily noise exposure. The contribution of the occupational noise exposure to the total hearing loss can then be estimated, if desired.

The selection of maximum tolerable or maximum permissible noise exposures and protection requirements, as well as the selection of specific formulae for impairment risk assessment or compensation purposes, require consideration of ethical, social, economic, and political factors not amenable to international standardization. Individual countries differ in their interpretation of these factors and these factors are therefore considered outside the scope of this International Standard.

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For reasons given above, this International Standard, by itself, does not comprise a complete guide for risk assessment and protection requirements, and for practical use, it has to be complemented by national standards or codes of practice delineating the factors which are here left open.