Safety Guideline

Use of ear-plug/headphone audio devices in the workplace (Digital Media Players IPods, MP3 Players, Walkmans, etc.)

1. General
The University of Queensland recognises that many staff and students own and use audio devices with ear-plugs/headphones.

This guideline aims to ensure the use of these devices does not impact on the health and safety of users and others at the University of Queensland.

2. Implementation of guideline
The following points shall be implemented by all University staff to minimise the impact of ear-plug/headphone audio devices:

- The health and safety of the wearer and others must not be compromised by the use of these devices. If the wearer’s situational awareness is reduced to the extent they cannot hear alarms, calls for help and so on, these devices must not be used.
- Staff and students should consider using a single ear piece and mono sound whenever possible, as this will help maintain awareness of what is happening around them.
- Staff and students must be made aware of the risk of permanent noise-induced hearing loss that results from exposure to excessive noise, including using high volume settings on their audio device. If someone standing nearby can hear what the ear-plug/headphone wearer is listening to, the volume is too loud.
- Devices that fit inside the ear – earphones, ear-plugs, ear buds, etc – have the potential to transfer harmful substances to the ear canal. When working in a biochemical laboratory where potentially infectious or toxic substances are in use, wearers must complete a specific risk assessment (see below) and should consider using a headphone that sits flat outside the ear, rather than an earpiece. Earplugs/headphones must not be repeatedly touched, adjusted or re-fitted to the ear, as there is a risk of contamination from biological/chemical substances.
- A specific Risk Assessment is required prior to the use of any ear-plug/headphone in a Laboratory or Workshop where:
  - Moving machinery is operated, e.g. centrifuges, lathes, drills, etc, to ensure the risk of entanglement is not increased.
  - Infectious organisms are present, e.g. PC2 or PC3 laboratories.
  - Toxic/carcinogenic substances are present.
  - Reduced situational awareness is considered too dangerous.
- Specific approval should be obtained from area managers, supervisors, etc, prior to the use of any ear-plug/headphone device in the workplace.
3. **Responsibilities**

a) The University of Queensland is responsible for ensuring the health and safety of its workers and others.

b) Schools/Organisational Units are responsible for recognising situations where the guideline may apply, ensuring the guideline is implemented in their units and advising the Occupational Health and Safety Unit of difficulties in implementing the guideline.

c) Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that individuals under their control understand the risk, comply with the guideline and are adequately supervised.

d) Individuals are responsible for complying with this guideline.