HEARING PROTECTION

Many workers are overexposed to noise, either from their own work or from ambient noise.
In time, overexposure decreases our ability to hear. Older workers might confuse work-related hearing loss with hearing loss due to aging.
It is possible to slow down or stop noise-induced hearing loss by taking precautions.
It's important to know that overexposure to noise doesn't necessarily take a long time. Short periods of very high noise can cause overexposure.
For example, working for only 15 minutes with a skill saw will lead to overexposure for that day.
Noise is generally measured in decibels (dB). The scale commonly used to measure noise that may harm human hearing is the 'A' scale. Decibels on the 'A' scale are therefore described as dBA.
You should wear hearing protection if you're exposed to noise levels such as:
• more than 85 dBA for 8 hours,
• more than 88 dBA for 4 hours, or
• more than 91 dBA for 2 hours.
Most power tools and equipment used in construction operate well over these levels.
Since it's difficult to reduce noise levels on site, the next best choice is hearing protection.
The two main types of hearing protection are muffs and plugs. They each have advantages and disadvantages but generally earmuffs provide better protection.

Muffs

- Useful for intermittent noisy work as they are quick and easy to put on and take off.
- Don't last forever. Their protection and comfort decrease over time. Muff cushions must be replaced when they lose flexibility or are damaged.
- Tension in the headband needs to be just right: too loose – they don't give enough protection; too tight – they're uncomfortable.