

Subject: Pastors eLink Sept 2010: Who cares what the law and the doctors say, we are worshipping!



Update on News & Events



'Sound Levels in Churches'. Too hot to handle?

I must warn the reader:

- a) I was an OHS Manager in a large company before retiring, and
- b) my ears are over 60 years old.

Someone just had to raise the issue of **high volume levels** in worship! Well, here goes....

Many churches are simply breaking the law. In an Australian workplace, [WorkCover](#) set safety standards including noise exposure limits based on Australian and International Standards. These are set on a base safe noise exposure of 85dB over an 8 hour period.

It's a bit technical, mainly because ears are amazing things! Ears hear in a non linear manner. This means that you can hear the faintest sound generated by small amounts of energy; and then if we multiply those sound levels by hundreds (or more) and you'll hear it without blowing your head off. Putting it another way, we come away from church after sitting in front of 100 watt speakers, and on the way home turn on the radio and listen comfortably to the car speakers being driven at less than 1 watt.

So; back to the WorkCover standard of 85dB for 8 hours... Sound measurement is a logarithmic scale to reflect the ears hearing method, eg **40dB is actually 100 times as loud as 20dB**, not twice as loud as you would think. So, in terms of exposure, for every additional 3dB (roughly the square root of 10, our log base) we need to halve our exposure time. This means that 88dB exposure is now 4 hours, 91dB is 2 hours, 94 dB is 1 hour etc. Today, for practical purposes in industry, where noise levels are over 85dB, hearing protection must be worn, no matter how long the exposure time is.

This raises some obvious questions for us:

1. **What are our church sound levels?** I suggest reading up on the issue, getting a good sound meter and then responding to what it says. Readings are normally taken on the 'slow' setting, but given the signal to noise ratio in a church (quiet background), the 'fast' setting gives a realistic picture of what is happening in peoples actual hearing responses. The Anglican church has an excellent [resource on the web](#) which explains this very well in layman's terms (see pages 18-25 in this particular linked module).

2. **Why don't churches get pinged** if they are breaking the law? WorkCover legally only covers "employees" and has no authority unless complaints are made by staff members. Congregational members have no legal means of forcing compliance. Hearing sensitive members can be add odds with the sound desk guys and have nowhere to go.

3. **But, honestly... why do we have it so loud in some churches?** Loud music does give a person a 'buzz', we all know how it feels. Could we possibly confuse this feeling with something to do with the Holy Spirit? Why do the fruits of the Spirit mentioned in the book of Galatians include the one of "self-control"? What is integrity in worship? Is worship 'above the law'? **Could one mans 'worship' be another mans 'hell'?** (It often is for me!)

It's good to ask some deeper questions about worship and sound levels.

Other points...

1. Sound levels in churches are often set by non trained people with some hearing loss.
2. Older people have more 'brittle' hearing mechanisms, ie they can't hear quiet sounds, but also find loud music painful (yep, that's me again!)
3. If people are complaining about sound levels or wearing ear plugs, it's simply too loud.
4. Professional sound engineers mix for the safety and needs of the audience, not just for themselves or peers.

Remember: **All (yes, all) excessive noise induces hearing loss, and all (yes, all) hearing loss, from any age, is PERMANENT.**

Take a baby to a loud church now, and when he/she grows up, he/she just might have you and/or your church in court one day!

Pastors have a responsibility to control noise levels now.

WHY NOT DO A [CHURCH SURVEY](#) WHICH INCLUDES FEEDBACK ON SOUND LEVELS? (and use independent, non staff, church members to run it)

Shane Cook spoke on the [prayer life of a pastor](#) at the last breakfast. Great stuff!!!! See the brief notes. My favourite line was "Our gift to the church is our prayer ministry"

Some [Coming Events](#) are listed in the 5 Islands Prayer Network website. There are also significant conferences coming up at the [Wollongong Lighthouse Church](#) and the [Figtree Church of Christ](#))

Pastors are invited to a [special lunch with Tim Costello](#) Sept 30th at the Novotel as part of the Lighthouse Church event.

Next Pastors Breakfast 0700 Friday 24th September at the Baptist Church, Warilla North.

Darryl

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