

Freedom of Information request reference number: 8947.1

Date of response: 06/09/2024

Request:

Under the Freedom of Information Act/Environmental Information Regulations I would like to request the following information:

I would like to receive all communications emails, texts, watsapp messages and minutes of any meetings that may have taken place between the FBU and LFB regarding the Hearing Standards and Hearing Aids policy drafting from Jan 2024 to present date.

Response:

Please see attached all correspondence we hold regarding the Hearing Standards and Hearing Aids policy drafting from January 2024 to present date.

Please note, personal data has been removed from the documents under [section 40 of the FOIA – Personal Information](#).

We have dealt with your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. For more information about this process please see the guidance we publish about making a request on our website: <https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/about-us/transparency/request-information-from-us>

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: CONSULTATION - Hearing standards and hearing aids policy
Date: 08 July 2024 11:02:35

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Do not click links or open attachments unless you are expecting them, even if you know the sender

Dear [REDACTED],

Apologies I thought I had already submitted comments please see our comments on the policy.

2.5 Why use the lower risk ear to grade individual. Surely it should be the Higher risk, makes no sense

3.1 Essentially brigade are dictating when individuals are to retire. Who determines that an individual must retire within 12months.

All senior officers go on the fireground so not just for FF – Stn o

4.1 RPM hearing test is not carried out by a qualified audiologist, nor is the hearing booth soundproof.

5.1 process need to be streamlined rather than waiting for NHS appointment.

5.2 Brigade need to decide who do hearing test

5.3 and 6.1 contradict each other

6.3 12 weeks is the minimum time the application takes

6.4 all appointments and communication with hearing aid supplier should be through brigade/OHS and not the individual

6.6 as above

7.1 It can take up to 3 months to be comfortable with hearing aids. Why only 2 weeks?

7.3 Appendix 1 needs amendment we are happy to discuss this further

8.1 makes no sense if brigade are supplying hearing aids

8.3 Needs to be a qualified audiologist

10.1 H&S legislation requires employers to provide PPE. Batteries could be put on poms or issued by OHS

10.4 its PPE and the employers responsibility and puts financial burden on individual.

11.2 (D) as above.

Appendix 1

No requirement for individual to insure
All appointments and communications with suppliers to be through the brigade/OHS

There is no mention at all about Tinnitus in the document, it goes hand in hand with hearing loss/impairment.

We look forward to your response.

From: [REDACTED] >
Sent: Tuesday, July 2, 2024 9:31 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]; [REDACTED]
Subject: FW: CONSULTATION - Hearing standards and hearing aids policy

Hi [REDACTED],

Please can I check if you had any comments on the attached. [REDACTED] has actioned comments back from [REDACTED] but [REDACTED] seemed to suggest that you may have responded too.

Thanks

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, May 16, 2024 2:46 PM
To: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: CONSULTATION - Hearing standards and hearing aids policy

Good afternoon,

Please find attached the Brigade's new draft policy on hearing standards and hearing aids for all

staff which is being sent for formal consultation.

The policy sets out the Brigade's process and provisions for digital in-ear hearing aids for staff who perform roles which are not compatible with the NHS provided over-ear hearing aid as well as providing guidance on the use of hearing aids on the fireground and whilst performing other duties. It also covers how the Brigade will identify staff required to use hearing aids, the testing process, how to maintain hearing aids and what action to take if hearing Aids are lost or damaged.

If you have any queries then you are welcome to contact [REDACTED] in Wellbeing direct.

Please can I have any comments back by 6/6/24 (21 days).

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

The information in this email is intended only for the named recipient(s) and may be privileged or confidential. If you are not the intended recipient please notify us on [REDACTED] and delete it from your system. Do not copy, distribute or take action based on the misdirected email. If the email is marked 'Personal' the FBU is not liable in any way for its contents. If you want to know more about the FBU, visit us at <https://www.fbu.org.uk>

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: CONSULTATION - Hearing standards and hearing aids policy
Date: 08 July 2024 11:33:57

Hi [REDACTED],

Thank you for the comments below that I have sent onto [REDACTED] for consideration and a response.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, July 8, 2024 11:01:19 AM

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: CONSULTATION - Hearing standards and hearing aids policy

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Do not click links or open attachments unless you are expecting them, even if you know the sender

Dear [REDACTED],

Apologies I thought I had already submitted comments please see our comments on the policy.

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We look forward to your response.

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, July 2, 2024 9:31 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: [REDACTED]

Subject: FW: CONSULTATION - Hearing standards and hearing aids policy

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Please can I check if you had any comments on the attached. [REDACTED] has actioned comments back from [REDACTED] but [REDACTED] seemed to suggest that you may have responded too.

Thanks

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, May 16, 2024 2:46 PM

To: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Cc: [REDACTED]

Subject: CONSULTATION - Hearing standards and hearing aids policy

Good afternoon,
Please find attached the Brigade's new draft policy on hearing standards and hearing aids for all staff which is being sent for formal consultation.
The policy sets out the Brigade's process and provisions for digital in-ear hearing aids for staff who perform roles which are not compatible with the NHS provided over-ear hearing aid as well as providing guidance on the use of hearing aids on the fireground and whilst performing other duties. It also covers how the Brigade will identify staff required to use hearing aids, the testing process, how to maintain hearing aids and what action to take if hearing Aids are lost or damaged.

If you have any queries then you are welcome to contact [REDACTED] in Wellbeing direct.

Please can I have any comments back by 6/6/24 (21 days).

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

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on the misdirected email. If the email is marked 'Personal' the FBU is not liable in any way for its contents. If you want to know more about the FBU, visit us at <https://www.fbu.org.uk>

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: CONSULTATION - Hearing standards and hearing aids policy
Date: 16 May 2024 14:45:00
Attachments: [Hearing Aids - Draft Policy v3 - Complete DRAFT FINAL .docx](#)

Good afternoon,

Please find attached the Brigade's new draft policy on hearing standards and hearing aids for all staff which is being sent for formal consultation.

The policy sets out the Brigade's process and provisions for digital in-ear hearing aids for staff who perform roles which are not compatible with the NHS provided over-ear hearing aid as well as providing guidance on the use of hearing aids on the fireground and whilst performing other duties. It also covers how the Brigade will identify staff required to use hearing aids, the testing process, how to maintain hearing aids and what action to take if hearing Aids are lost or damaged.

If you have any queries then you are welcome to contact [REDACTED] in Wellbeing direct.

Please can I have any comments back by 6/6/24 (21 days).

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: FW: Hearing standards and hearing aids
Date: 24 April 2024 11:26:40
Attachments: [HSWIA - Hearing standards and hearing aids policy.docx](#)
[Hearing Aids - Draft Policy v3 - Complete DRAFT FINAL .docx](#)
[London Hearing Centre report.pdf](#)

Hi [REDACTED],

The RO is looking to publish imminently, do you have any comments?

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

Consultation, Performance and Project Support Officer
Health and Safety

London Fire Brigade
169 Union Street London SE1 0LL

Email: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, March 28, 2024 4:32 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: FW: Hearing standards and hearing aids

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

Consultation, Performance and Project Support Officer
Health and Safety

London Fire Brigade
169 Union Street London SE1 0LL

Email: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 29, 2024 2:07 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: BJCHSW [REDACTED]

Subject: Hearing standards and hearing aids

Hi [REDACTED] and [REDACTED],

Please find attached the documents for the new Hearing Standards and Hearing Aids policy and supporting report. Would you like this to be added to the agenda for the next meeting?

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

Consultation, Performance and Project Support Officer
Health and Safety

London Fire Brigade
169 Union Street London SE1 0LL

Email: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Hearing standards and hearing aids
Date: 25 April 2024 10:11:29
Attachments: [image001.png](#)



[REDACTED]
Wellbeing Team
People Services Department
London Fire Brigade Headquarters
169 Union Street (3rd Floor)
SE1 0LL

T: [REDACTED]
E: [REDACTED] / WellbeingTeam@london-fire.gov.uk

Visit our website at www.london-fire.gov.uk



W: <https://londonfire.sharepoint.com/sites/HW-WellbeingBenefits>

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, April 25, 2024 9:40 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Hearing standards and hearing aids

That's great [REDACTED], thank you. Ill send this onto staff side however they seemed happy with everything else.

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

Consultation, Performance and Project Support Officer
Health and Safety

London Fire Brigade
169 Union Street London SE1 0LL
Email: [REDACTED]
Mobile: [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, April 24, 2024 4:51 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: Hearing standards and hearing aids

[REDACTED]

Thanks for this.

Once the individual has been diagnosed with needing a hearing aid they fill in an Access to Work claim form (as the hearing aid(s) will belong to them, not the LFB). This will then be sent to Access to Work who will refund LFB (as we pay for the hearing aid(s) up front) up to 80% of the approved costs between a threshold and £10,000. As an employer we will contribute 100% of costs up to the threshold level (£1000) and 20% of the costs between the threshold and £10,000.

The amount of the threshold is determined by the number of employees an organisation has.

Number of employees Amount of threshold

0 to 49 employees nil

50 to 249 employees £500

Over 250 employees £1,000

Any balance above £10,000 will normally be met by Access to Work.

Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Wellbeing Team
People Services Department
London Fire Brigade Headquarters
169 Union Street (3rd Floor)
SE1 0LL

T: [REDACTED]

E: [REDACTED] / WellbeingTeam@london-fire.gov.uk

Visit our website at www.london-fire.gov.uk



W: <https://londonfire.sharepoint.com/sites/HW-WellbeingBenefits>

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, April 24, 2024 12:17 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: Hearing standards and hearing aids

Thanks [REDACTED]. I have just spoken to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] is happy to agree this however just wanted clarification on cost. In the policy it states that some of the money is recovered through access to work, please could you clarify how this works?

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

Consultation, Performance and Project Support Officer
Health and Safety

London Fire Brigade

169 Union Street London SE1 0LL

Email: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, April 23, 2024 9:10 AM

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: Hearing standards and hearing aids

[REDACTED]

No problems, we'll publish as soon as all the necessary governance has been completed.

Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Wellbeing Team

People Services Department
London Fire Brigade Headquarters
169 Union Street (3rd Floor)
SE1 0LL

T: [REDACTED]

E: [REDACTED] [/WellbeingTeam@london-fire.gov.uk](mailto:WellbeingTeam@london-fire.gov.uk)

Visit our website at www.london-fire.gov.uk



W: <https://londonfire.sharepoint.com/sites/HW-WellbeingBenefits>

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, April 22, 2024 4:02 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Hearing standards and hearing aids

Hi [REDACTED],

Please accept my apologies for not coming back to you sooner. The last BJCHSW meeting was cancelled and I haven't received any response from staff side on this. I will send them a nudge to see if they have any comments – do you know when you are looking to publish?

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

Consultation, Performance and Project Support Officer
Health and Safety

London Fire Brigade
169 Union Street London SE1 0LL
Email: [REDACTED]
Mobile: [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, April 22, 2024 2:35 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Hearing standards and hearing aids

[REDACTED]

Hope all is good.

Can I assume that as I haven't heard back I can move this forward with a view to publication?

Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Wellbeing Team
People Services Department
London Fire Brigade Headquarters
169 Union Street (3rd Floor)
SE1 0LL

T: [REDACTED]
E: [REDACTED] / WellbeingTeam@london-fire.gov.uk

Visit our website at www.london-fire.gov.uk



W: <https://londonfire.sharepoint.com/sites/HW-WellbeingBenefits>

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 29, 2024 2:05 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: FW: Hearing standards and hearing aids

Hi [REDACTED],

Thank you for sending this through. Please find attached the signed copy, I will send this over to the RB's as it may require consultation at the next BJCHSW meeting.

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

Consultation, Performance and Project Support Officer
Health and Safety

London Fire Brigade
169 Union Street London SE1 0LL
Email: [REDACTED]
Mobile: [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 29, 2024 11:50 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Hearing standards and hearing aids

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [BJCHSW](#)
Subject: RE: Hearing aids and standards
Date: 25 April 2024 12:36:01
Attachments: [image003.jpg](#)
[image004.jpg](#)

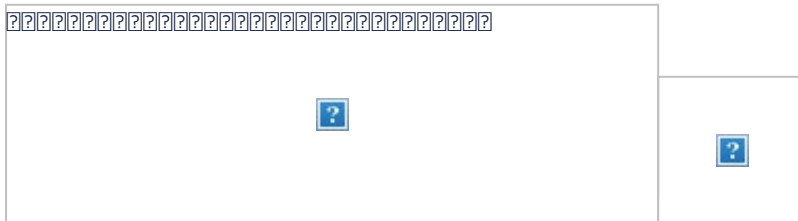
[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Do not click links or open attachments unless you are expecting them, even if you know the sender

Hi,

Okay . thanks . That is closed then please.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] | Regional Chair | Health | Safety | wellbeing joint secretary
Region 10 | Fire Brigades union | Alpha house | 100 Borough high street
London | SE1 1LB | [REDACTED] | [REDACTED]



From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 25 April 2024 09:41
To: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Cc: BJCHSW [REDACTED]
Subject: Hearing aids and standards

Hi [REDACTED],

[REDACTED] has got back to me with the question around cost you had regarding hearing aids:

Once the individual has been diagnosed with needing a hearing aid they fill in an Access to Work claim form (as the hearing aid(s) will belong to them, not the LFB). This will then be sent to Access to Work who will refund LFB (as we pay for the hearing aid(s) up front) up to 80% of the approved costs between a threshold and £10,000. As an employer we will contribute 100% of costs up to the threshold level (£1000) and 20% of the costs between the threshold and £10,000.

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50 to 249 employees £500
Over 250 employees £1,000

Any balance above £10,000 will normally be met by Access to Work.

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

Consultation, Performance and Project Support Officer
Health and Safety

London Fire Brigade
169 Union Street London SE1 0LL

Email: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

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From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Hearing Aids
Date: 29 July 2024 11:59:48
Attachments: HearingAids.mso
RE Hearing aids and standards.mso

Hi [REDACTED],

Yes no problem at all, please see below the minutes from the BICHSW meeting:

| | | |
|-------|---|--|
| 3.992 | Hearing standards and hearing aids | 21/03/2024 Staff Side requested documents. Action: Staff Side to review 25/04/2024 Staff Side have reviewed the documents and are happy for the item to close. Action: Item to close |
|-------|---|--|

There were some questions around cost and access to work please find email trail attached.

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

Consultation, Performance and Project Support Officer
Health and Safety

London Fire Brigade
169 Union Street London SE1 0LL
Email: [REDACTED]
Mobile: [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, July 29, 2024 11:49 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Meeting Minutes

Good morning all, Could I request a copy of all communication between union officials and brigade regarding the hearing aid policy. I would appreciate copies of communications from the date the draft policy was sent to the union for oversight to the present. It would be greatly appreciated if I could have these in my possession by the end of today Monday 29/07/24.

[REDACTED] I have included you in the hope that you could provide me with minutes of the BICHSW that was held where the new hearing aid s policy was discussed . The latest copy of minutes of any BICHSW meeting which I can find is https://londonfire.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/BWD/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7BFF828BCE-4574-42EF-8FF9-3FC6AA82161%7D&file=BICHSW%20-%20Minutes%20-%202023-10%20-%20October.docx&action=default&mobiledirect=true&DefaultItemOpen=1

I am particularly interested in the details pertaining to union recommendations and discussions around this [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] I'm assuming that you are the main protagonists in this.

Yours hopefully and expectingly

[REDACTED]

Sub O
Disability Equality Support Group

London Fire Brigade
169 Union Street London SE1 0LL
T 020 8555 1200
E [REDACTED]

london-fire.gov.uk

| Item number | Item name | Date of meeting and minutes |
|-------------|------------------------------------|--|
| 3.992 | Hearing standards and hearing aids | 21/03/2024 Staff Side requested documents.Action: Staff Side to review 25/04/2024 Staff Side have reviewed the documents and are happy for the item to close. Action: Item to close |

Part 1: Project/Policy description

| |
|---|
| Name or Title of Policy/Project and Reference Number (if available): |
| <p><i>Please attach the policy documents to the HSWIA</i></p> <p>Hearing standards and hearing aids policy</p> |
| Purpose of Policy/Project: |
| <p><i>Provide a brief description</i></p> <p>The policy provides guidance to LFB employees (operational staff only) with hearing issues, outlining what standards need to be achieved and what process is to be followed to access a hearing test and, if so required, what actions will be taken to provide hearing aid(s)</p> |

Part 2: Risk assessment

| | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Have Health and Safety risks associated with your project/policy been considered? | Yes | No |
| <p><i>(Health and safety risks associated with the release of a new policy or project must be considered at an early stage of the project or policy development and might be subject to consultation. Consider early staff-side involvement)</i></p> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you identified significant hazards and or health and safety risks? | Yes | No |
| <p><i>(A risk assessment is required if the policy or project has hazards that introduce significant risks of injury or ill health to employees and/non LFB employees that require risk reduction measures)</i></p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>1. If <u>significant H&S risks were identified</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Record the findings of the risk assessment using the appropriate LFB risk assessment form and following the guidance provided in PN673 Risk assessment procedure. b. Submit the HSWIA and risk assessment to Health and Safety for review and consultation with staff side at BJCHSW. <p>2. If <u>no significant risks were identified</u> during the risk assessment process, it is not necessary to record the finding of the risk assessment. Please submit the HSWIA to Health and Safety for review.</p> | | |
| Comments: | | |
| NA | | |

Part 3: Consultation with employees on health and safety

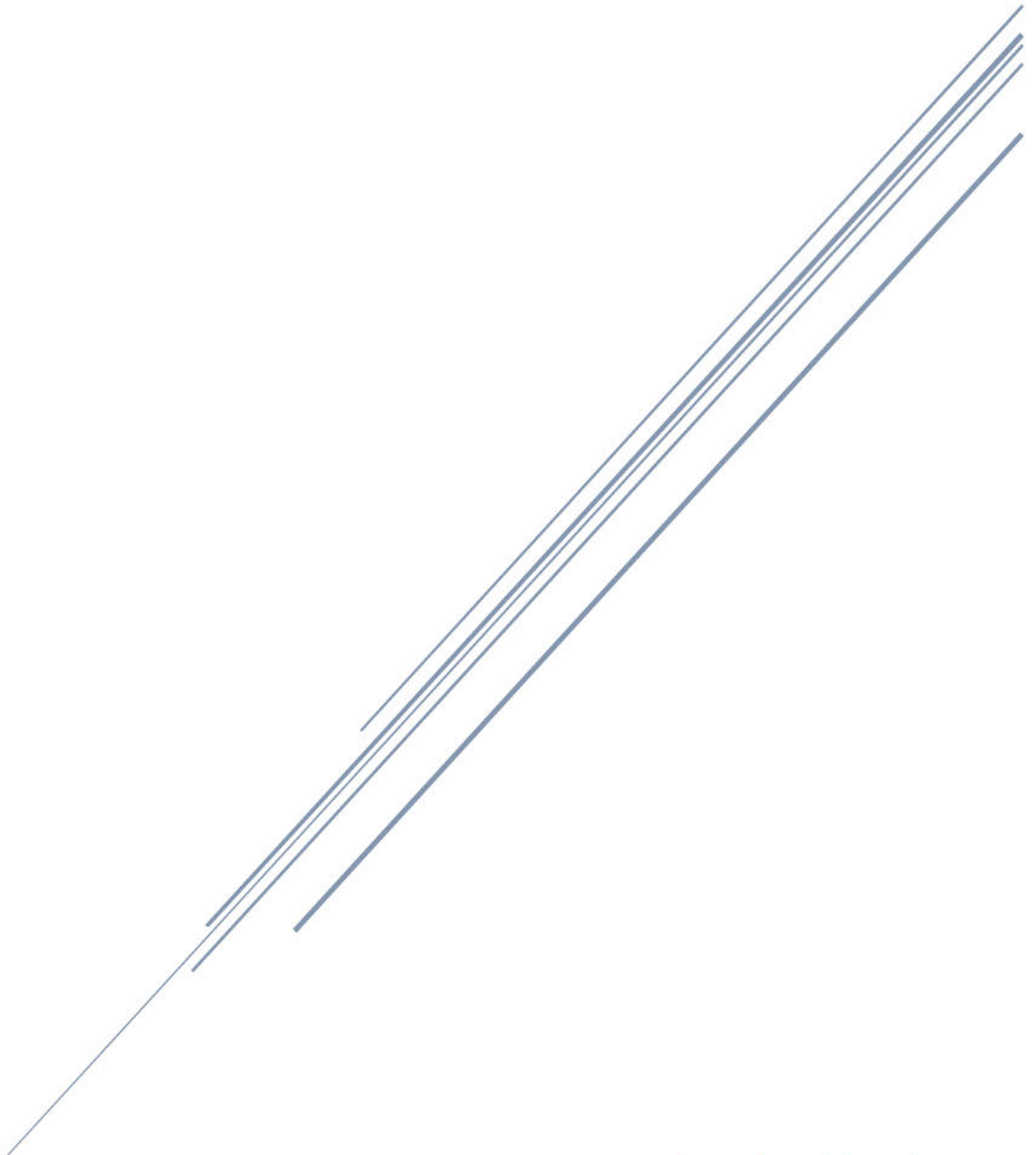
| Health and Safety consultation requirements | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>(Consultation at BJCHSW is required if you answer YES to one of the following question or if significant health and safety risks were identified – see part 2)</i> | | |
| | Yes | No |
| • Are you identifying or assessing hazards or risks that may harm people? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Are you making a decision on how to control risks that may cause harm? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Are you making decisions about the adequacy of facilities for employees welfare? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Are you making decision about procedures/policies to: | | |
| - Consult with employees on health and safety matters? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| - Resolve health and safety issues? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| - Monitor employees' health and workplace conditions? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| - Provide health, safety and welfare information and training? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Are you making a decisions about the arrangements for getting competent health and safety advice? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Are you determining the membership of any health and safety committee? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Are you proposing a change to: | | |
| - The physical structure of the workplace? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| - Plant, equipment and substances used in the workplace? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| - The work performed at the workplace that may affect the health and safety of employees? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Is consultation at BJCHSW required? <i>(Consultation with staff side at BJCHSW is required if you have answered YES to any of the above questions)</i> | Yes | No |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Please submit the HSWIA and associated documents to Health and Safety for review. | | |
| Comments: | | |
| An independent report (attached) was produced by London Hearing in April 2022 that determined what hearing aid would be most suitable for LFB operational staff in the rank of FF to Station Officer inclusive. Other ranks were not included as individuals occupying these ranks are able to access free hearing aid provision via the NHS. | | |

Part 4: Health and Safety review

| For completion by the Health and Safety Services Department | | |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Is a risk assessment required? | Yes | No |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Is consultation at BJCHSW required? | Yes | No |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Comments | The policy is presently with the HR Policy Team to advise on what governance route the document should take. | |
| Reviewed by: | Date | |
| | | |

HEARING AIDS LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

Author: [REDACTED]



London Hearing
04/04/2022

The purpose of this report is to identify the most suitable hearing aid that can be used by active firefighters in the London Fire Brigade.

Section 1

Hearing Aids

Several different types of hearing aids were used, as listed below:

In the ear (IIC)

- Phonak M90 Titanium IIC (*small medical grade titanium shell*)
- Widex Moment 440 IIC (*small acrylic shell*)



Example

Behind the ear (BTE)

- Phonak P90-R (*rechargeable hearing aid*)
- Phonak P90-312 (*battery powered*)
- Widex Moment 440 RIC 10 (*smaller battery powered hearing aid*)



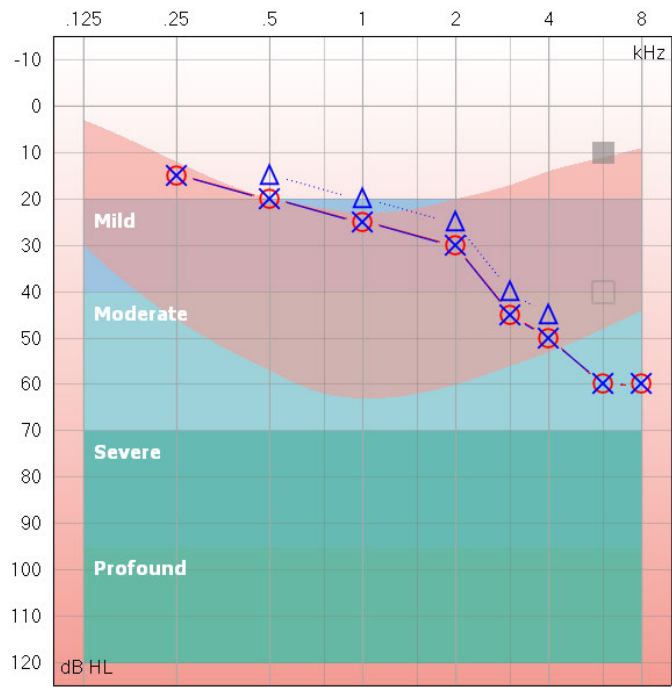
Example

See Appendix A for more images.

All hearing aids used for the purpose of this report were premium, digital hearing aids available in the private market.

The hearing aids were programmed to suit the most common type of hearing loss, Presbycusis.

Presbycusis is more commonly known as age related hearing loss. This consists of good low frequency hearing thresholds, but poorer high frequency hearing. A typical audiogram is shown below:



ATEX Certification

ATEX product certification is the verification of the design specification of a manufacturer's product in relation to a series of relevant standards laid out under the directive. ATEX Certification is a product regulation which ensures the safety of equipment intended for use in potentially explosive atmospheres. Several manufacturers produce ATEX certified hearing aids but unfortunately my research did not lead me to find any IIC ATEX certified hearing aids. Only BTE ATEX certified aids were found.

Section 2

Activity

I was subjected to real fires in a controlled environment. The situation consisted of observing a training session where firefighters had to rescue a casualty from inside a mock-up ship. Parts of the ship were on fire which the firefighters had to safely extinguish.

I had to also wear full firefighting PPE gear during the operation. I subjected myself to the environment with different hearing aids to evaluate their performance and adequacy.

Observations and Comments

PPE Gear

The PPE gear is very bulky. Several layers are worn for maximum protection from head to toe. The area of interest for hearing aid use is around the ears, where a few layers are worn along with a breathing apparatus.

Hearing aid evaluation

- It was immediately evident that BTE hearing aids were not suitable. The level of comfort was very poor. Prolonged use of BTE aids combined with wearing the PPE gear will no doubt be extremely unpleasant. The top of the ear where the aid sits, would become very sore.
- IIC aids were by far the more comfortable aids. Due to their nature of sitting inside the ear canal, the PPE gear was not obstructive.

Moving around

The activity included moving around the ship, climbing ladders, stairs, squeezing through tight tunnels and so on.

Hearing aid evaluation

- The BTE aids did not feel secure behind the ear and fell out a few times. Luckily the PPE prevented the hearing aid from getting lost.
- IIC aids were far superior in terms of how secure they felt inside the ears. The hearing aids did not fall out. However, it is important to note that this does not mean that IIC aids are 100% secure. This is very dependent on how aggressive body/head movements are, so firefighters will need to be aware of this. But as IIC aids are custom made for the wearer's ear, they should have a good level of security/retention in the ear.
- The titanium IIC hearing aids would be the most desired hearing aids due to the strength of the titanium material used.

Temperatures

Temperatures on the body suit reached approximately 50°C. Temperatures closer to the fire reached significantly more. This was evaluated using a heat sensor camera.

Hearing aid evaluation

- Both the BTE and IIC aids all worked in high temperatures. All hearing aids were examined after the event in the clinic and no faults were found.

Communication

Communication is of course essential when fighting a fire with a team. A lot of key information is relayed by shouting. The breathing apparatus made it difficult to hear clearly. However, many firefighters reported that they become very familiar with key words used during these situations hence word recognition improves substantially with experience.

Hearing aid evaluation

- When wearing BTE aids, I heard a lot of scratching sounds where the PPE was brushing against the hearing aid microphone. This is due to the position of the hearing aid on the ear.
- IIC aids performed a lot better as the microphone position (in the ear) meant that there was no brushing against PPE.
- A limitation experienced by both types of aids was that due to the loud noise in the fire environment, the aids went into a 'safety mode' where sounds were suppressed significantly for a few seconds. This 'antishock' feature can be adjusted and made less severe to reduce its effect.

Radio Equipment

No problems at all were experienced when using radio systems / audio systems. All hearing aids are well equipped to deal with other audio equipment.

Other comments

Hearing aid wearers would not be able to engage in water rescue missions as the hearing aids are not waterproof. There is a substantial amount of moisture present in the environment at times, therefore hearing aid wearers would require drying crystals or a UV drying box for use every night.

Section 3

Conclusion

BTE aids were not secure when moving around in the fire environment. They were also not very comfortable due to the PPE and the microphone had problems brushing against the PPE.

Based on the points highlighted in section 2, IIC hearing aids are the most suitable type for firefighters. In addition, the titanium shell IIC hearing aids are significantly stronger than acrylic IIC aids. Therefore, it would be ideal to use this material.

Preferred Hearing Aid: Phonak M90 Titanium Hearing Aid

It should be noted that this hearing aid is not ATEX certified. As stated in section 1 of this report, no IIC hearing aids were found to be ATEX certified. Therefore, caution should be administered if proceeding with the Phonak M90 Titanium Hearing Aid.

Due to the lack of ATEX certification, this report cannot make a 'recommendation' based on safety for a particular hearing aid to be used by firefighters.

However, based on the results of this activity, the preferred hearing aid would be the model stated above. But nor Phonak (the manufacturer) or London Hearing should be liable for injuries in the event of adversity.

The note below from Phonak sheds more light into the situation:

There is a certification process for hearing instruments called the "intrinsic safety for hearing instruments". This procedure is not done for Phonak products.

Hearing Instruments in general are unable to create sparks or dangerous heat due to the rather low voltage & low power of the battery.

To be on the safe side we advise the following when wearing HIs in explosive areas:

- a) Do not operate the Power switch
- b) do not operate any user control (toggle switch) to change programs
- c) Do not operate any accessories, keep them switched off (e.g. Remote Controls)
- d) Do not change the battery within the explosive areas

Kind Regards,

Sonova Technical Team

Other Considerations

Repair and Replacement

Hearing aids used in normal circumstances require repair/servicing twice a year. Due to the nature of the work carried out by firefighters, we may need to service these aids more often. It is difficult to predict how often this will be as there are several variables involved. See 'Warranty and Aftercare' section below for further information.

Ideally hearing aids should be replaced every 4/5 years due to the introduction of newer technology. However, this is not essential and is at the discretion of the user.

Acclimatisation

I would recommend wearing the hearing aids for 4 weeks in non-fire environments to adapt to the newly amplified sounds. Once the user is more comfortable and familiar, they can then slowly expose themselves to more challenging environments. A minimum of 4 weeks until used in firefighting environments.

Management Summary for active firefighters wearing hearing aids

- Hearing aid servicing appointment every 3 months (could be via post)
- Review appointments every 6 months
- Hearing test annually
- Use drying crystals & or UV drying kit every night
- Uphold general maintenance and cleaning of hearing aids

Warranty and Aftercare

All our premium hearing aids include a comprehensive 5-year warranty. This covers ALL types of repairs in full. The only two exclusions are:

- Loss of device
- Irreparable damage (i.e., device breaks in several small pieces)

Our aftercare lasts for the lifetime of the device. This includes annual hearing tests, follow-up appointments and tuning appointments. We charge a fee for ear wax removal appointments.

Appendix A

BTE Hearing Aid



IIC Hearing Aid

