

## **OHS INFORMATION SHEET No. 34: THE USE OF AUDIO HEADPHONES/EARPHONES/EARBUDS IN THE WORKPLACE**

September 2009

Monash University has a duty of care for the health and safety of staff, students, contractors and visitors. It recognises that many staff and students use audio equipment (audio-visual & multi-media production etc) and other devices (MP3 players, iPods etc) with headphones/earphones/earbuds and that this may be directly associated with work or study.

This information sheet aims to provide advice to ensure that the use of these devices does not impact on the health and safety of users and others at Monash University.

The following points should be considered by all University staff and students to minimise the potential health and safety impacts associated with the use of audio headphones/earphones/earbuds.

### **General**

- If the wearer's situational awareness is reduced to the extent that their health and safety is compromised by the use of these devices e.g. they cannot hear emergency alarms, calls for help etc, then these devices must not be used.
- The use of high volumes can cause permanent noise-induced hearing loss. If someone standing nearby can hear what the wearer is listening to, the volume is too loud.
- Staff and students should consider using a single ear piece whenever possible, to assist in maintaining awareness of what is happening around them.
- Headphones/earphones/earbuds should be maintained in a clean and hygienic state. It is important to follow the manufacturer's instructions when cleaning these devices due to the potential for damage to the electrical/electronic components contained in the unit.
- Internal units such as earbuds should be single user only due to hygiene issues.

### **Activities requiring the use of headphones/earphones/earbuds**

- Where activities require the wearing of headphones/earphones/earbuds, a risk assessment must be completed prior to their use. This is especially important in laboratories, workshops, studios or any other area where harmful biological, chemical or other substances and materials e.g. infectious or toxic substances, metal particles etc are used.
- If a risk assessment indicates there is no alternative but to use the headphones/earphones/earbuds, approval must be obtained from area managers, supervisors, etc, prior to the use of any such items in the workplace.
- Headphones/earphones/earbuds must be stored in such a way that minimizes the risk of them being contaminated by biological, chemical or other substances and materials.
- Ideally external units such as headphones and earphones should be single user. Where this is not practical it is important to insure that the units are cleaned according to manufacturer's instructions prior to transfer between individuals.
- Headphones/earphones/earbuds must not be repeatedly touched, adjusted or re-fitted to the ear where there is risk of contamination from biological, chemical or other substances and materials

For further information contact your local OHS&E Consultant or Occupational Health and Safety by phone on 990 51016 or by email on [ohsehelpline@adm.monash.edu.au](mailto:ohsehelpline@adm.monash.edu.au).