

Can you hear me at the back?

When health and safety manager Geoff Fitch read a report from the Royal National Institute for the Deaf and the TUC claiming that call centres are making people deaf, he decided to check out the facts.



Dr Mike Lower and Geoff Fitch check out noise levels with the mannequin.

“I was furious when I read the report because it implied that all call centres are bad for your health,” says Geoff. “The authors hadn’t been in a Direct Line call centre, yet we were tarred with the same brush.”

Geoff challenged the report’s author, but decided that the only way to refute the claims was to commission DL’s own research — so he called in the experts.

“I got in touch with Dr Mike Lower at Southampton University’s Institute of Sound and Vibration Research and asked him to undertake research at the second floor telesales area at

Croydon’s call centre.”

It was a strange sight. Mike arrived with lots of acoustic equipment — and a mannequin dressed in a T-shirt! After installing the equipment inside the mannequin’s head, he fitted a series of headsets on top and recorded the noise levels.

The results came through in November — and confirmed that DL is using excellent systems. “Our sound levels are well within the safety limits set out by the Noise at Work Regulations,” says Geoff.

But Geoff will be making some changes as a result of the research.

“Dr Lower did research using four or five different types of headsets, so we now know that headsets which cover both ears provide the best protection from background noise,” he says. “We’ll be providing them for anyone who wants to use them.”

If you would like to speak to someone about your headset equipment, please talk to your immediate manager. And to make sure that DL is regarded as a safe employer on the hearing issue in the future, Chris Wermann, head of corporate affairs, has written to the head of the RNID to make him aware of DL’s excellent results.

Extract from ‘Hotline’, the magazine for staff at Direct Line Group, issue 19, Winter 1999. Reprinted with permission. © 1999, Direct Line Insurance..

Hotline Winter 1999



7