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## Wanted: Muffled machines with sounds of near-silence New program will help governments to Buy-Quiet

By ERM Diebach  
Times staff reporter

Ever since the rattle of the first internal combustion engine and the dawn of the 'Age of Refuse, the modern citizen has been led by his ears to a circular fate.

He works, in order to pay taxes, so that government can buy those Scorch-ROAR-along garbage trucks.  
He goes to work, in turn, to awaken him at 8 a.m. more late to pay for still more garbage trucks.  
While the community of such a system may appeal to the citizen, the government, its noise has tended to drive urban taxpayers berserk.

Now the federal Environmental Protection Agency, arm-in-quietly-arm with the anti-regulatory sponsors of free enterprise, is whispering street repair, and a measure of quiet too.  
The EPA, League of Cities, and the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing are out to change the spooklets spooklets BANG hiss THUD of government to a Hinnmmmmmmmm.

The program is (shhh) called Buy-Quiet. Its aim is to use an estimated \$50 billion in annual federal and local government buying power to convince but not compel industry to hush up its engines.  
In Olympia this week, spokesmen from the purchasing institute met with government contracting agents — they who actually spend all that money — to explain how quietness can be specified in bid competitions just like price, durability, and energy consumption.

The result, in coming years, should be everything from muffled mowers (about 100 already have been bought for Washington State Parks this summer) to lip-ticking typewriters.

Let us suspect a "buy-quiet conference" was just one more excuse for officialdom to conduct business, listen to the observation of the institute's League of Cities survey, one of the biggest complaints that city and city managers have to deal with is noise.

He cited a silence-lover in Milwaukee who used a noisy shogun to knock down a utility greenman after the hapless target had turned out to be a saw to trim tree limbs which were lying on power lines.  
Or lend an ear to the Institute's Sieve Gordon. "Studies have shown excessive machine noise can cause hearing loss, stress that leads to heart disease, and even affects unborn children." It also

leads to whopping disability payments for government workers who claim the hearing of employees.  
Hear that, David Johnson, who said quieter buses could help defuse citizen opposition to such things as Metro's proposed transit base in North Seattle.  
Listen to Paul George, a State Parks purchasing agent who said electric vehicles are replacing the traditional chugga-chugga pickups that make night circuits of camp areas.

But if you don't want to listen to them, listen to the machines themselves, who had a sort of press conference on the capital lawn in Olympia.

A chain saw, when clad with a muffler — said to report — gives merely from extructrualing to partially loud.

But mowers changed from Goodrich to Bambi. A vacuum cleaner purred instead of yowled, and a lawnmower compressor sounded as quiet as an idling VW Bug.

A pilot driver ploached instead of chugged, and a French-invented garbage truck seemed classy yet quietly circumspict — a refuse-chewer with manners. Unfortunately, on this continent it is available only in Canada.

"We (America) can do it, but we don't," one participant complained.

The Buy-Quiet campaign got its start a couple years ago when El Segundo, Calif., measured the noise level of brush chippers and found the quietest also was the best engineered and least expensive.

The EPA encouraged the Washington D.C.-based purchasing institute and League of Cities to spearhead the idea.

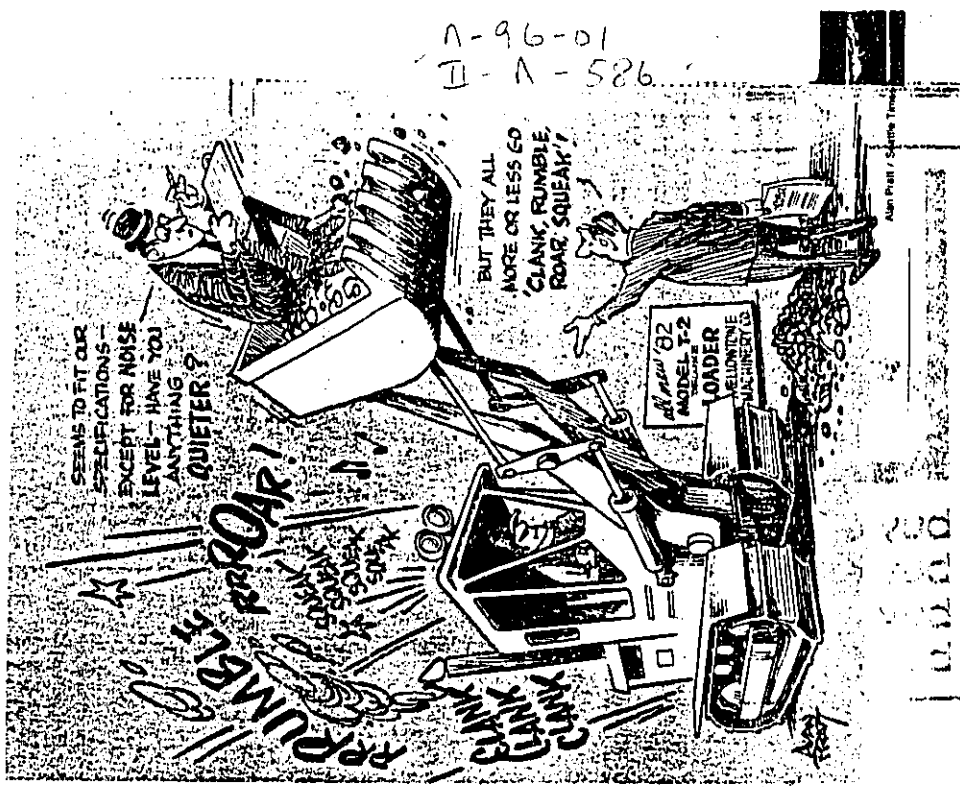
Gay McEckardt, state purchasing officer, observed that "when you try to force the answer, observed to do something by law, they don't like it. But when they can do it voluntarily to compete, it works."

Now jackhammers, frost end loaders, weed-whackers and air conditioners are being measured in some of the 350 cities and states participating in Buy-Quiet to see how well they zip their mechanical lips.

Passer! You wanna buy quiet for you own backyard?

The consumer marketplace is still catching up. While industry response to the government initiative has been good, muffled participants were told retail demand for muffled machinery has been weak.

Condon recalled that one major retail chain that brought out quiet vacuum cleaners. The product bombed, he said. Because framemakers figured that any vacuum that powerful couldn't be very powerful.



Alan Pratt / Sports Illustrated